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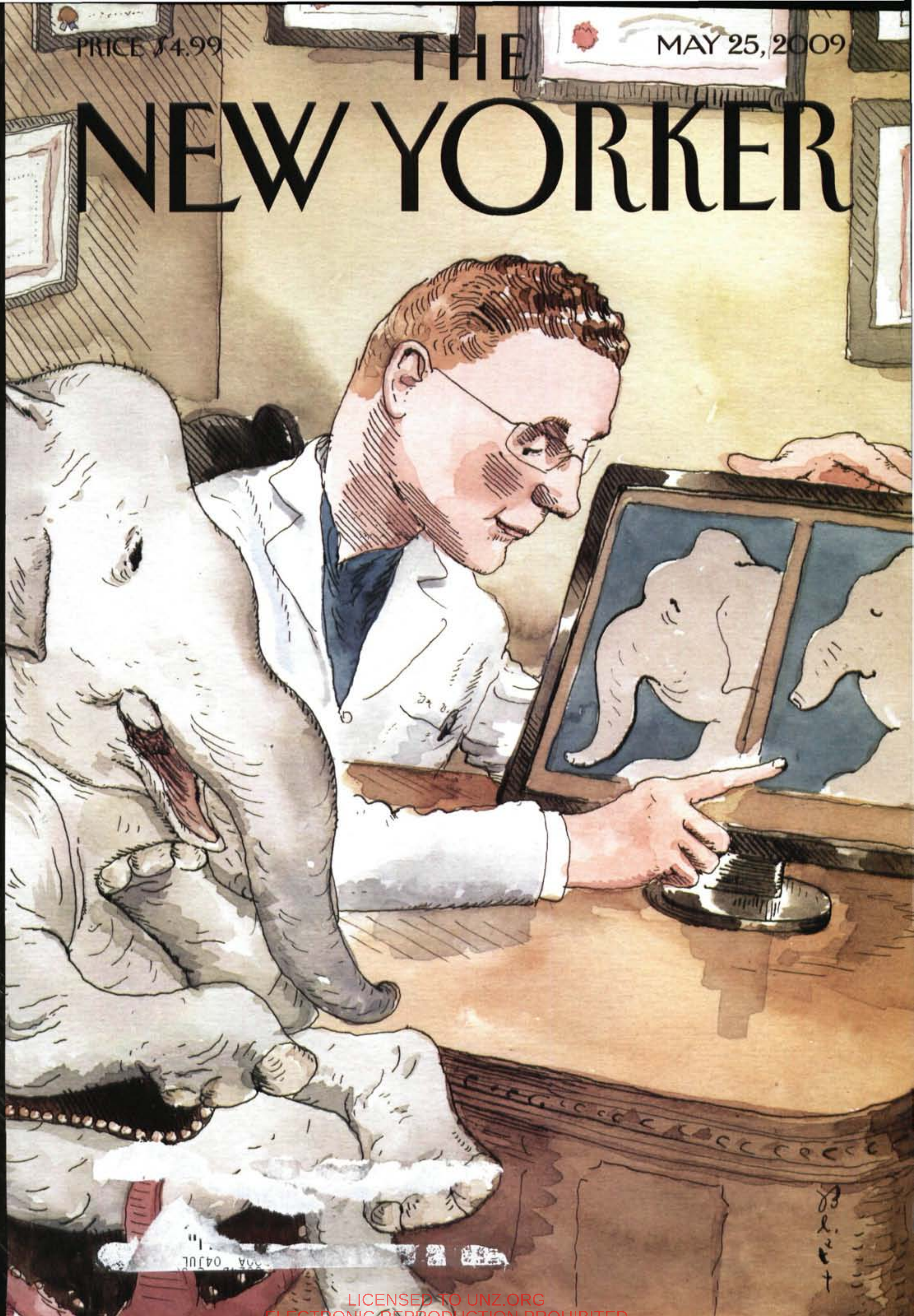

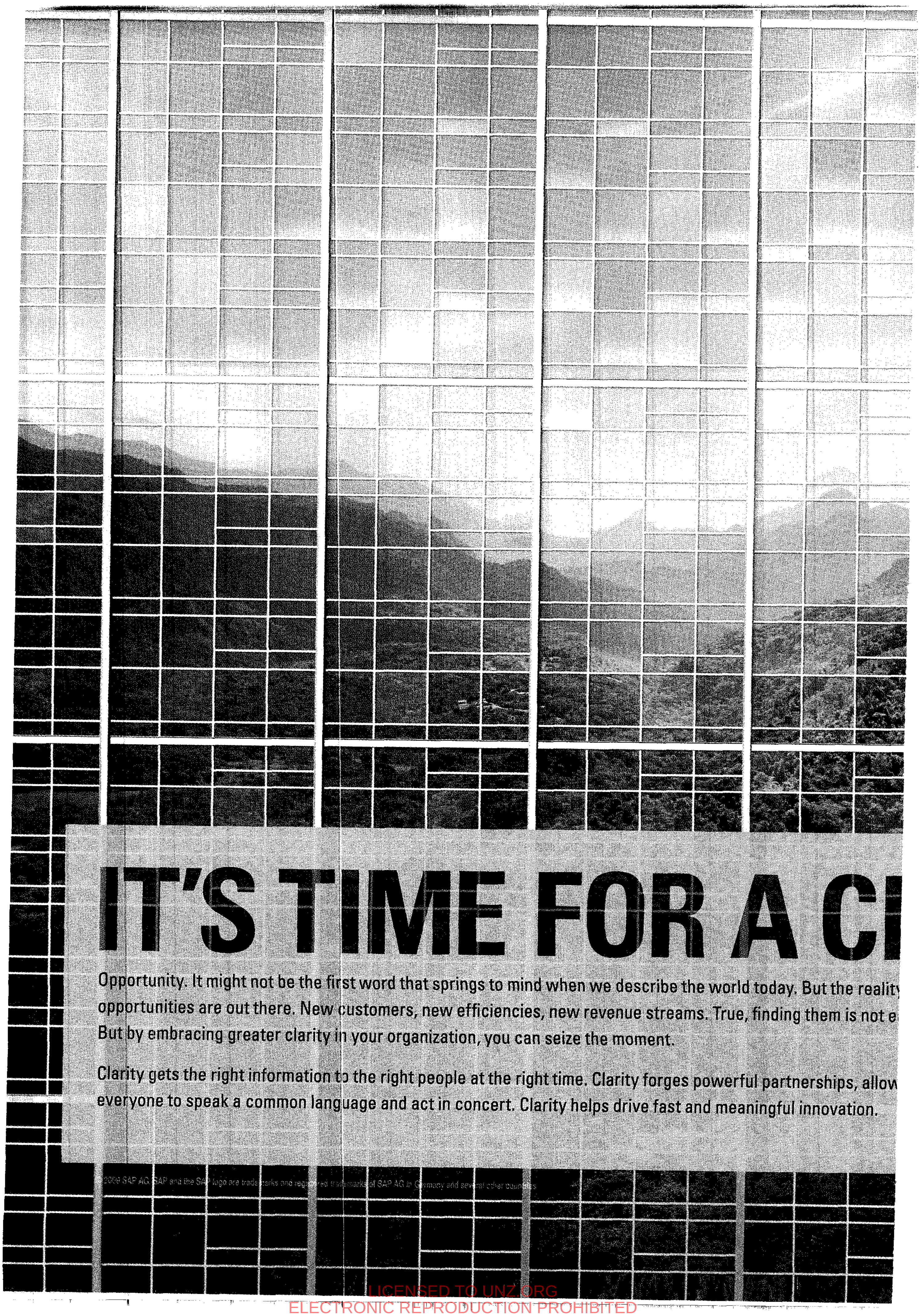

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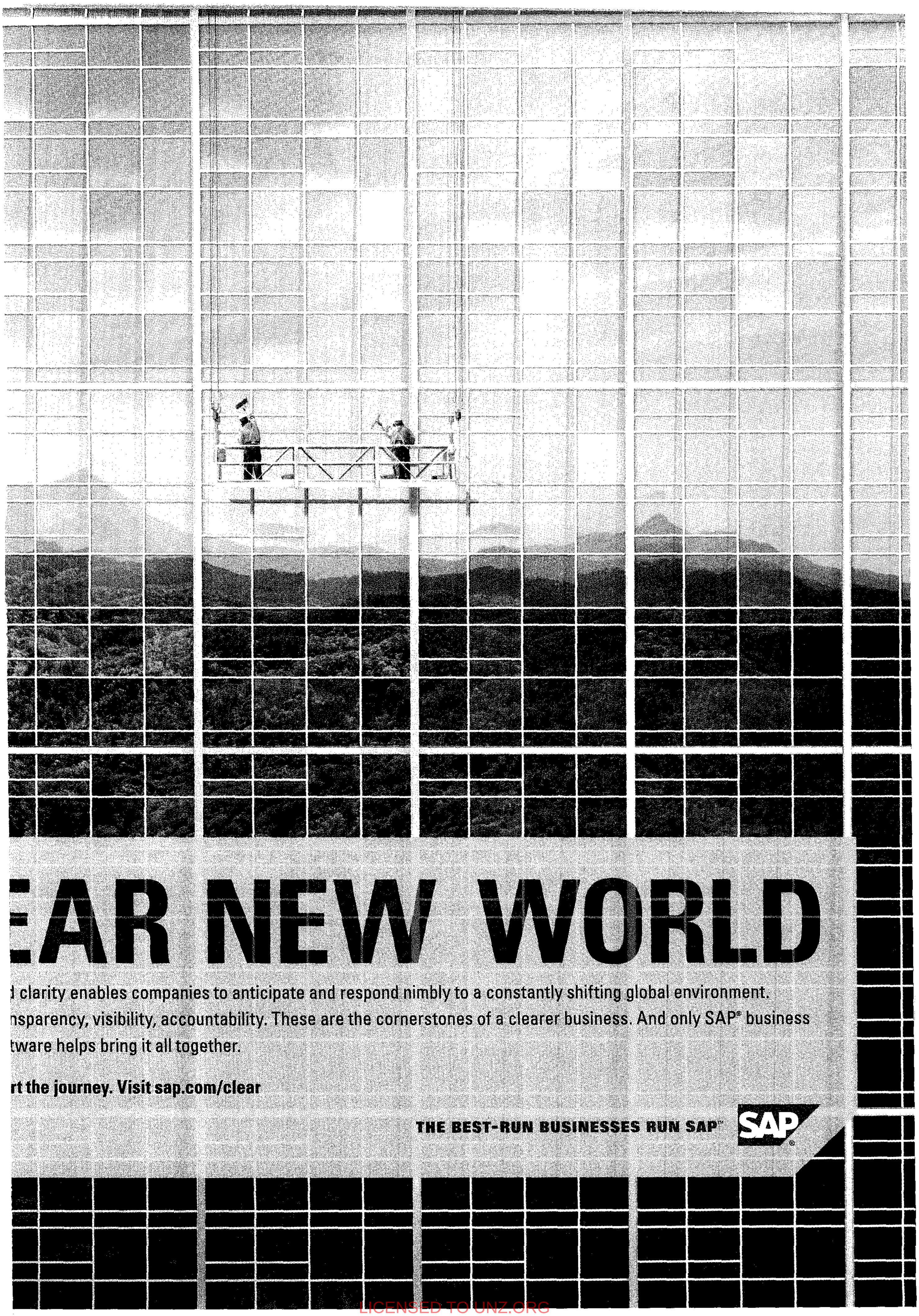

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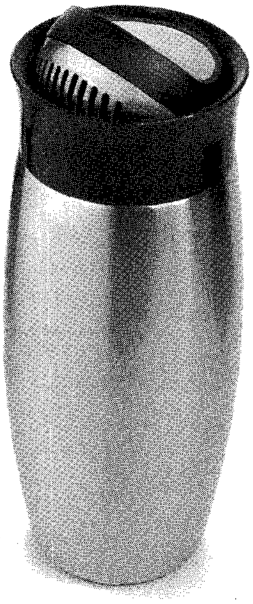

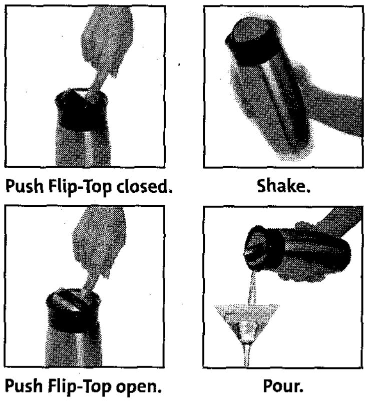

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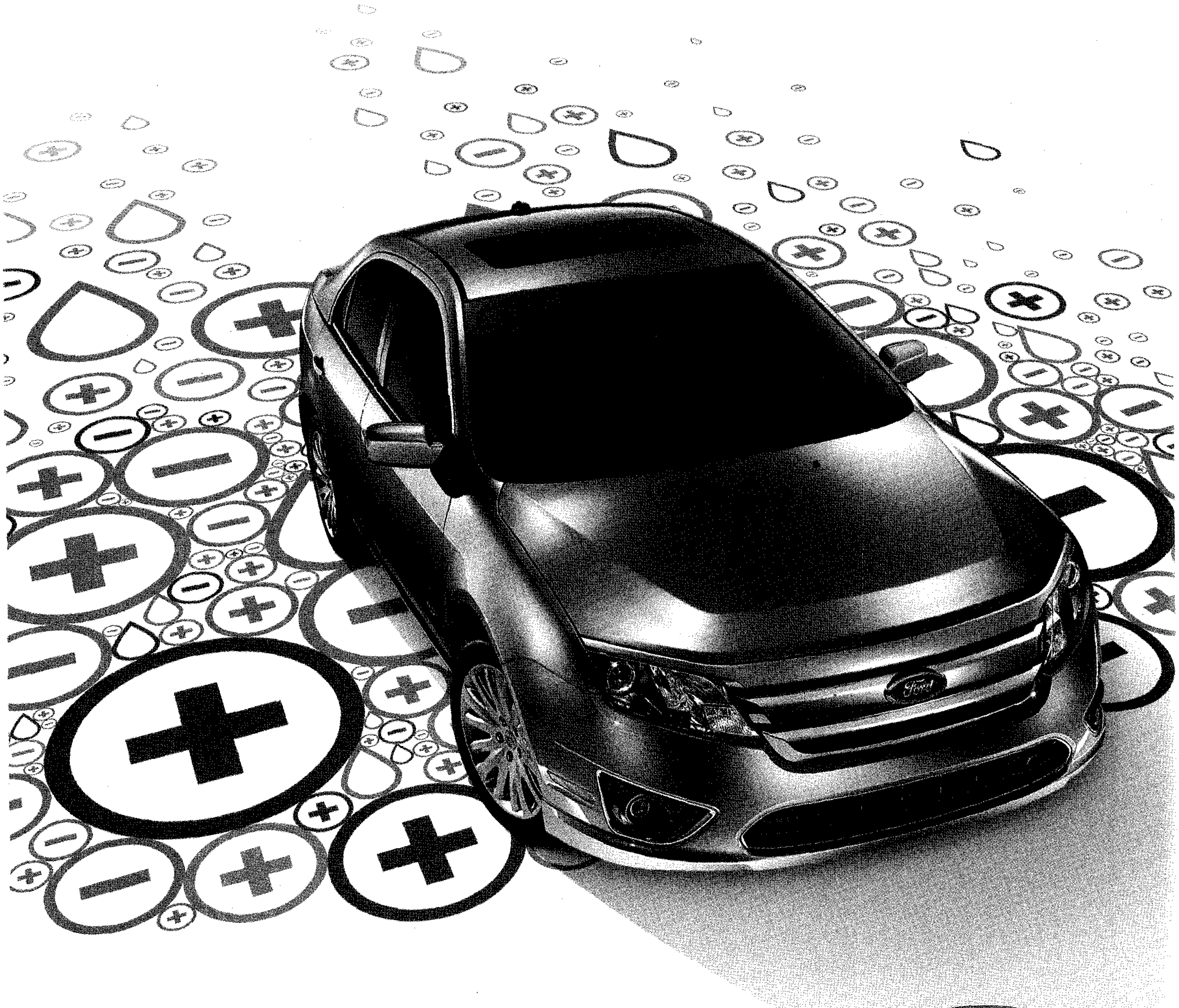

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CONTRIBUTORS

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 23) is the president of the New America Foundation. Two of his books, "The Bin Ladens" and "On the Grand Trunk Road: A Journey Into South Asia," are out in paperback.

Patricia Marx ("Face Value," p. 32) writes for film and television. Her most recent book is "Dot in Larryland," with illustrations by Roz Chast.

Ann Hodgman (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 37) has a new book, "How to Die of Embarrassment Every Day," coming out in the fall.

John McPhee ("One-Stop Shopping," p. 38), a staff writer, will publish "Silk Parachute," his twenty-eighth book, in January.

George Meyer (The Talk of the Town, p. 31) lives in Seattle and is writing a novel.

Robert Gibb (Poem, p. 49) has a collection of his selected poems, "What the Heart Can Bear," coming out in the summer.

Barry Blitt (Cover) is an artist and an illustrator whose work has appeared in the magazine since 1992. "What's the Weather Inside?" is his latest book.

Jeffrey Toobin ("No More Mr. Nice Guy," p. 42) is a staff writer and the author of, most recently, "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," which won the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize.

Elizabeth Kolbert ("The Sixth Extinction?," p. 52) writes frequently about the environment. She is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change."

Philip Levine (Poem, p. 60) will publish his seventeenth collection of poetry, "News of the World," in October.

Jonathan Lethem (Fiction, p. 64) has written eight novels, including "Chronic City," which will be published in October.

David Denby (A Critic at Large, p. 72; The Current Cinema, p. 90), a film critic for the magazine, has written three books, including "Snark," which came out in January.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 86) is the author of "Let's See: Writings on Art from *The New Yorker*."

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 88) writes about architecture for the magazine.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Ask the Author: *Jeffrey Toobin* takes readers' questions about the Supreme Court. / Audio: *Elizabeth Kolbert* on mass extinction; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts our weekly political roundtable. / Video: A teen-age candidate for City Council; sessions from The New Yorker Summit. / Slide show: *Peter Schjeldahl* on Alice Neel. / Blogs: *Steve Coll* on the stimulus, *Judith Thurman* in New Zealand, *Richard Brody* on Cannes, plus posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *James Surowiecki*, *George Packer*, *Amy Davidson*, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

NOT JUST NECTAR

I enjoyed Noah Baumbach's imagining of what bees on cocaine—the subject of my study—would say to one another if they could talk (Shouts & Murmurs, May 4th). By treating bees with cocaine as they collected nectar from an artificial flower and observing their dance language back in the hive, we found that the cocaine-treated bees signalled that the food they collected was of far greater quality than that of the untreated bees. This is similar to the heightened responsiveness to rewards seen in human cocaine users. Because of the relative simplicity of the bee brain, the most basic systems by which the brain reacts and adapts to cocaine are laid bare. I hope, with this study, to further the understanding of drug abuse, and perhaps inspire new treatments for drug abuse and addiction. While I appreciate the funny side of my work (when you give bees cocaine for a living, you rather have to), there is a serious side to it, too.

Andrew Barron
Department of Brain, Behaviour, and Evolution, Macquarie University
Sydney, Australia

RARE BOOKS

Dan Chiasson, in writing about C. P. Cavafy, refers to the "unmentionable novels by unknown and forgotten writers" that Cavafy's library contained (Books, March 23rd). Today, the library is housed at the Spoudasterio Neou Hellenismou, in Athens, and contains more than nine hundred books. Among them are a hundred and forty-four in English; the most striking are the twelve gold-bound volumes of Edward Gibbon. Among the writers represented in the three hundred and sixty-three French books are Balzac, Baudelaire, Daudet, Hugo, and Zola. True, all of Cavafy's books were not "high literature." He owned books such as Roger de Beauvoir's "Aventurières et Courtisanes," Marguerite Bellanger's "Les Amours de Napoléon III," and Adolphe Belot's "Courtisane," all of which may seem unmentionable enough.

Michaela Karampini-Iatrou
Editor, the Library of C. P. Cavafy
Athens, Greece

MAKING A MODERN NOVEL

Jill Lepore, in her review of the life and work of Edgar Allan Poe, sees a winking self-consciousness as a manifestation of Poe's contempt for his readers (A Critic at Large, April 27th). It might be better understood as a defining mood of popular culture. The man who wrote both "The Fall of the House of Usher," with its "mad hilarity" and rising terror, and "A Predicament," which mocks its own sensationalism, had a deep understanding of the connections between humor and fear. Every narrative that turns toward unreliability or ambiguity written since the eighteen-forties owes a debt to Poe.

Paul Lewis
Professor, English Department
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Mass.

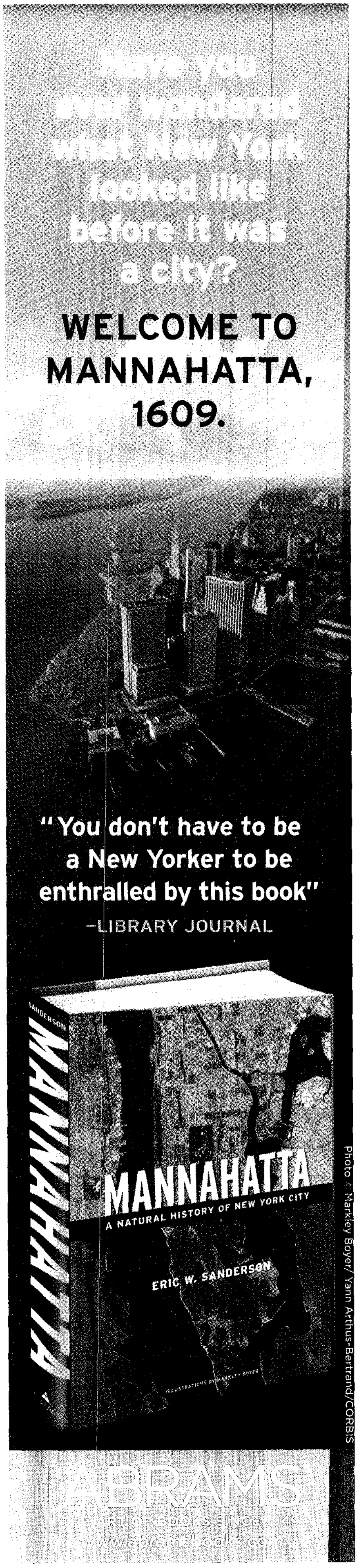
RINGING ROUNDS

Elif Batuman, in her article on the return of the Danilov bells to their Russian home from Harvard, writes that "Western European bells play melodies" ("The Bells," April 27th). However, the tradition in England, Wales, and Scotland since the seventeenth century is of "change ringing," a mathematically based method by which bells switch places each time they are rung, according to a predetermined pattern. This produces a complex dance of sound that eventually returns to the order in which the bells started. It is this highly musical, but not melodic, peal with which many people are familiar.

Malcolm Burson
Portland, Maine

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.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An exhibition of works by Yayoi Kusama, at Gagosian. Photograph by Gus Powell.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
24	25	26	20	21	22	23

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DOWN SOUTH

Delroy Lindo, who originated the role of Herald Loomis in the 1988 Broadway début of August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," which is currently being revived at the Belasco, returns to the stage in Naomi Wallace's drama "Things of Dry Hours," as an unemployed Sunday-school teacher living in Alabama. Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs the play, at New York Theatre Workshop. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
STARGAZING

The seductive Swedish vocalist Nina Persson, of the Cardigans, is taking her on-again, off-again side project, A Camp, on its first U.S. tour. The band, a trio that also includes Persson's husband, Nathan Larson, and the guitarist Niclas Frisk, traffics in catchy, eclectic pop music. A Camp comes to the Bowery Ballroom this week. (See page 10.)

ART
FIGURE OF REACH

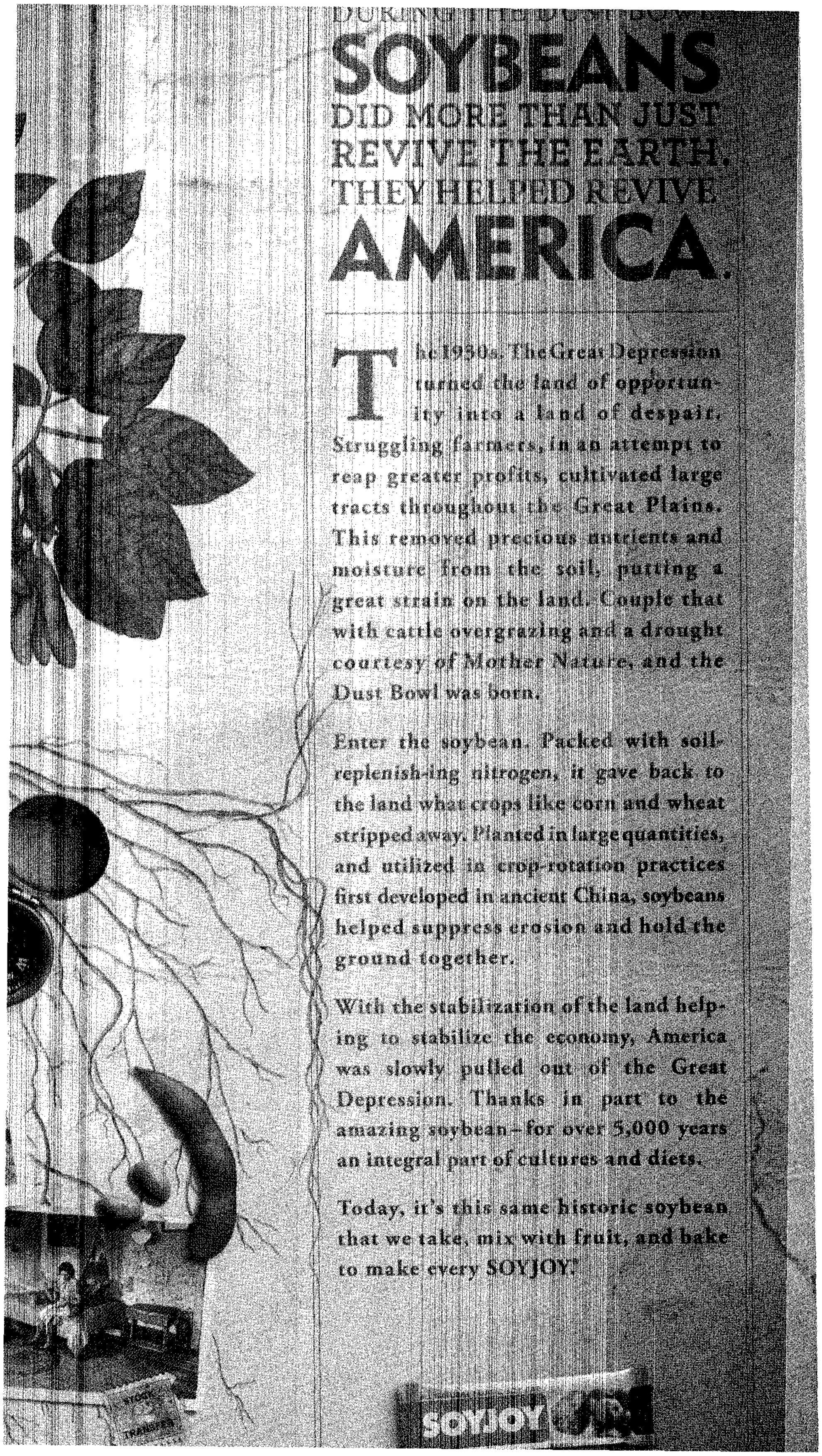
The searing figurative works of the great British painter Francis Bacon (1909-92), which Adam Gopnik once described in these pages as a "marriage of glamour and suffering," are the subject of a centenary retrospective at the Met. (See page 13.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
COLLEGE BOUND

Listeners starved for big-time opera during the springtime lull can flock to Carnegie Hall this week, where the ever-ambitious Collegiate Chorale offers a concert performance of Gluck's "Alceste," with Deborah Voigt holding down the title role and George Manahan conducting. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
YOUNG BLUE EYES

Steve McQueen couldn't hold a candle to the Chairman of the Board when it came to singing or dancing, but his baby blues were at least as seductive, even in black-and-white. Film Society of Lincoln Center offers a week of McQueen's classic films, including "Love with the Proper Stranger," co-starring Natalie Wood, and "The Cincinnati Kid," co-starring Ann-Margret. (See page 18.)



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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AMERICAS OFF BROADWAY
This festival culls plays produced by American regional companies, including "A Play on Words," by Brian Dykstra, from Ithaca's Kitchen Theatre Company, and "Pure Confidence," by Carlyle Brown, from Minneapolis's Mixed Blood Theatre, which starts previews May 22. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CORALINE
Stephin Merritt, of the Magnetic Fields, wrote the music and lyrics for this musical, and David Greenspan wrote the book, based on the novel by Neil Gaiman, about a bored, lonely girl who steps into a fantasy world. Jayne Houdyshell stars in the title role. Leigh Silverman directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

FUTURITY
At Joe's Pub, the Brooklyn band the Lisps perform their indie-rock musical, about a Civil War soldier who is also an aspiring science-fiction writer. May 22 and May 24. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777.)

MAKE ME
At Atlantic Theatre Company, a new comedy by Leslie Ayvazian, about three different couples in jeopardy. Christian Parker directs. In previews. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

MARATHON 2009
This year's festival of new work, presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre, includes plays by Billy Aronson, Leslie Ayvazian, Jeanne Dorsey, and Garrett M. Brown. Opens May 22. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

NEXT FALL
Naked Angels presents the world première of a new comedy by Geoffrey Nauffts, about a Christian who saves an atheist from choking. Previews begin May 26. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NIGHT SKY
Daniella Topol directs a play by Susan Yankowitz, about an astronomer who becomes mute. Previews begin May 22. (Nagelberg Theatre at Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101.)

OUR HOUSE
Michael Mayer directs the New York première of a new dark comedy by Theresa Rebeck, about a news anchor who becomes the star of a reality show. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

REFLECTIONS: AN EVENING OF SHORT PLAYS
The Resonance Ensemble presents short works by Beckett, Chekhov, Michael Feingold, and others, directed by Eric Parness. In previews. Opens May 21. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RIVALRY
Norman Corwin wrote this play, about the 1858 debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Vincent Dowling directs. In previews. Opens May 21. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE (OR, THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS)
Cynthia Hopkins performs in the final installment of her Accidental Trilogy, which chronicles the adventures of a galaxy-travelling explorer. D. J. Mendel directs. Previews begin May 22. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE I DIE
Zakiyyah Alexander's new play, about two estranged sisters attempting to reconcile, kicks off Second Stage's uptown summer series. Jackson Gay directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

THINGS OF DRY HOURS
Naomi Wallace wrote this play, about a black Sunday-school teacher who gives shelter to a white refugee. Delroy Lindo and Roslyn Ruff star; Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs. Previews begin May 22. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

VIEUX CARRÉ
Austin Pendleton directs the Tennessee Williams play, set in a New Orleans boarding house. In previews. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN HWANGAP
Lloyd Suh's new comedy, presented by the Play Company and Ma-Yi Theatre, centers on a Korean family in West Texas celebrating its patriarch's sixtieth birthday. Trip Cullman directs. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

BLOODY BLOODY ANDREW JACKSON: THE CONCERT VERSION
As part of the Public LAB series, Alex Timbers, in association with Les Freres Corbusier, wrote and directs this musical, a satirical look at the seventh President. Michael Friedman wrote the music and lyrics. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through May 24.)

CHRISTMAS IS MILES AWAY
At the Connelly, Babel Theatre Project presents this drama by Chloe Moss, which follows three English friends as they grow apart. Geordie Broadwater directs. (220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
At the beginning of Eugene O'Neill's 1924 play, set on a New England farm circa 1850, Eben Cabot (Pablo Schreiber) pines for his dead mother. His grief is exacerbated by the man he holds responsible for his mother's death: his father, Ephraim (Brian Dennehy). The director, Robert Falls, has cut the play from three acts to one, and made the script more openly erotic and less biased against the character of Abbie (Carla Gugino), the new bride whom Ephraim brings home, and whom Eben takes to and against from the first. It's a measure of Falls's inventiveness as a director that Abbie and Eben's desire for each other is rarely spoken. And when the inevitable happens—Eben and Abbie consummate their passion, thus entering the "hopeless hope" that O'Neill claimed as the credo of many of his characters—we can barely stand the suspense. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/11/09.) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE DISHWASHERS
Dressler and Moss have spent most of their adult lives in the run-down basement of an expensive

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restaurant, happily scraping and washing dishes. The young new dishwasher, however, who used to eat at the restaurant before he lost everything, is horrified to find himself with his hands in the muck alongside these two simple old men, whose contentment is baffling to him. Morris Panych's small comedy (from the Chester Theatre Company), the first production of the "Americas Off Broadway" festival, could be subtitled "Zen and the Art of Manual Labor"; over the course of two acts, the new guy, schooled by Dressler, a kitchen-sink philosopher, begins to see the wisdom in wanting nothing. There's depth in Panych's spare, Beckett-esque dialogue, but the fun of the play is compromised by stagey acting and the director Byam Stevens's choice to have the actors look out over the heads of the audience while they speak to each other. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who moves to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

GROUNDSWELL
The New Group presents a thriller by Ian Bruce, in which two South African lodge employees hatch a get-rich-quick scheme involving nearby diamond mines. Larry Bryggman, David Lansbury, and Souleymane Sy Savane star; Scott Elliott directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

I HAVE BEEN TO HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR
Chiori Miyagawa's impressionistic three-person play has as its baseline a cultural critique of the 1959 Alain Resnais film "Hiroshima Mon Amour," which viewed Japan's tragedy through distinctly French eyes. Did Resnais romanticize the atomic bomb, or underrepresent its victims? More important, the play asks: Who are any of us in the long shadow of Hiroshima? In scenes that delicately muddy time and identity, shifting from 1945 to 1959 and occasionally to present day, Miyagawa contemplates the paradox of remembering a city that—surreally, horrifyingly—one day ceased to exist. The play is the centerpiece of the Hiroshima Project, which includes readings of mid-century plays by Japanese writers. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

WAITING FOR GODOT
Of the many accomplishments of Anthony Page's astute new production (the first Broadway revival, after fifty-three years), the most impressive is its clarity about the central paradox of Beckett's vision: the compulsion to narrate our meaninglessness is our meaning. In the new production, two noted comic actors, Nathan Lane and Bill Irwin, take on the roles of Estragon and Vladimir. They are lucid, they get all their laughs, but the price of their cultivation is an unfortunate absence of urgency. Lane meets all the challenges of the play, except the challenge to find the terror behind his professional manic mask. John Goodman plays Pozzo, the sadistic master who controls Lucky (the excellent John Glover) with a whip and a long rope, with the ferocity and impetuousness of a big baby who wants an audience. The bittersweet ending, like Page's production, is both heartbreaking and exhilarating. (5/18/09) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

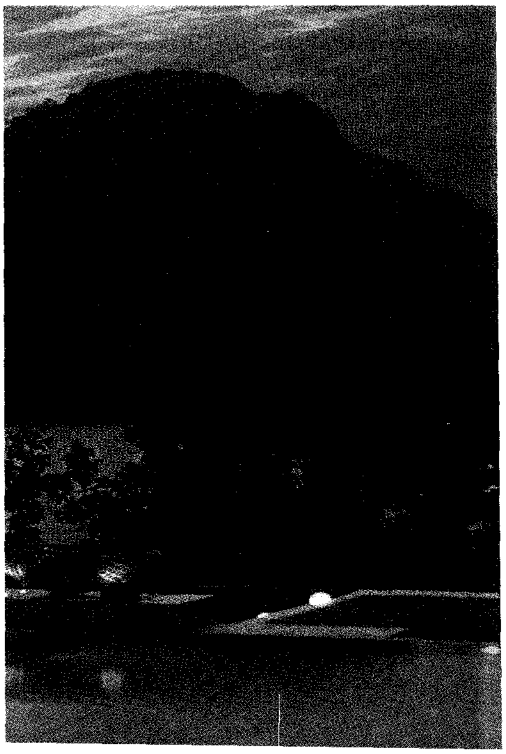
Also Playing

ACCENT ON YOUTH: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **EXIT THE KING:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **IRENA'S VOW:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Through May 25. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY STUART:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OFFICES:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE PHILANTHROPIST:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **33 VARIATIONS:** O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. Through May 21. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 21: The **Easy Star All-Stars.** In 2003, this local reggae collective made a modest splash with "Dub Side of the Moon," a clever interpretation of Pink Floyd's classic album "Dark Side of the Moon." Three years later, the group garnered further notice when it applied its magic to Radiohead's "OK Computer" on a record titled "Radiodread." Now it's made the big time, with the new album "Easy Star's Lonely Hearts Dub Band." The cover version of the Beatles's trippy "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" album has charted, and for good reason. Even Beatles haters will find joy in these songs. May 24: Most renowned for their ubiquitous 1986 single "Walk Like an Egyptian,"



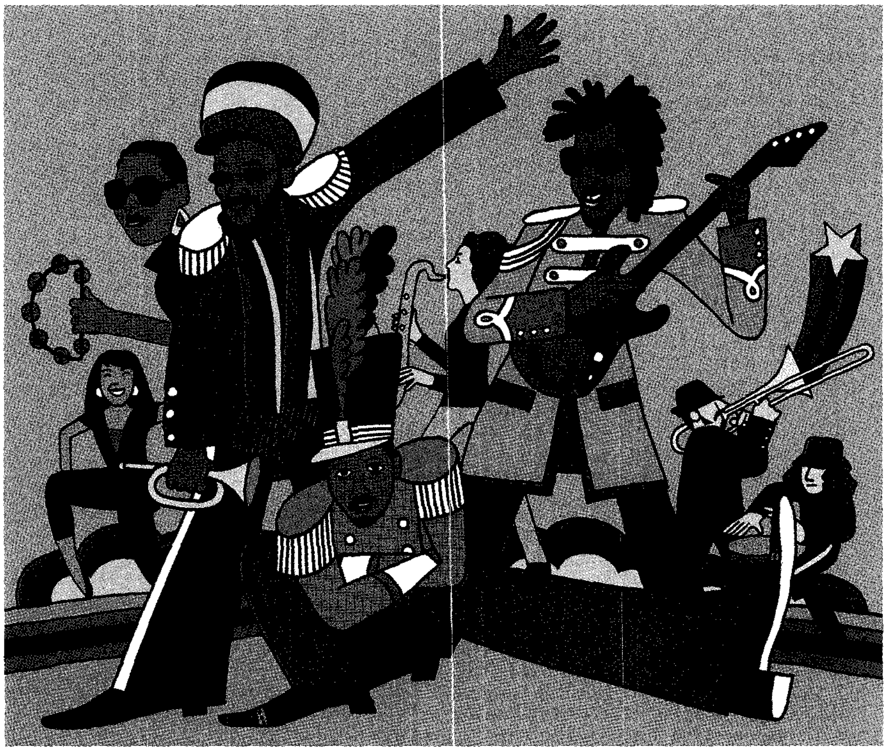
the all-female quartet the **Bangles** rose from L.A.'s Paisley Underground scene of retrophilic garage bands to become one of the more videogenic pop outfits of the decade. The band split in 1989, but after years of pursuing different projects, most of the original members have reunited.

BKLYN YARD
388-400 Carroll St. (no phone)—Formerly known simply as the Yard, this scruffy and lovable outdoor venue alongside the Gowanus Canal nearly became a thing of the past. The land it occupies was slated to be developed, but events (such as the economic collapse and the possibility that the area would be declared a Superfund site) have conspired to let the party continue. It reopens for the season on May 23 with "Parked," a daylong celebration of the city's street-food culture, with Pizza Moto, the Community Juice Truck, the Red Hook *huarache* venders, and other mobile eateries. The following afternoon, the "Sunday Best" d.j. series gets under way with **Quentin Harris** joining the resident d.j.s **Justin Carter, Eamon Harkin,** and **Doug Singer.** (www.bklynyard.com.)

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 20: The visual artist and singer-songwriter **Jeffrey Lewis** is a whip-smart native New Yorker who has built a career based on witticism, quirks, and romantic misfortune. With a new album, "Em Are I," and a new name, the Junkyard, for his band (though its members haven't changed: his brother Jack is still on bass, and David Beauchamp is on drums), Lewis returns from recent overseas tours with new songs about insecurity and heartache. The opening act is **Diane Cluck,** whose guitar playing lays the tracks for sensual and melancholic journeys. May 26: An eclectic indie supergroup of sorts, **A Camp** is a project featuring the Swedish bombshell Nina Persson, of the Cardigans, on vocals, the ex-Shudder to Think guitarist Nathan Larson (Persson's husband) on bass, and Persson's fellow-Swede Niclas Frisk, of Atomic Swing, on guitar. Persson has said that the trio's new album, "Colonia," its second, addresses the contentious and potentially unwieldy issue of colonialism, but, wisely, the group surrounds its more pointed insights with lushly produced pop.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 21: "Blackenedfest" brings together a gaggle of extreme-metal bands for an evening that will be decidedly low on cheer. The bill includes the black-metal stalwarts **Mayhem** and Sweden's blasphemous **Marduk.**

FIVE SPOT SUPPER CLUB
459 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn (718-852-0202)—The monthly party Dig Deeper fills this Brooklyn soul-food spot with the hip-shaking sounds of vintage soul music. Organized by DJ Honky (Richard Lewis) and Mr. Robinson (Michael Robinson), the night features the finest in old vinyl and rare live performances. The two spin 45s from 10 P.M. to 4 A.M., with a midnight set by some of the genre's least heard from survivors, including, on May 23, the soul singer **Renaldo Domino,** who is making his first ever New York City appearance, and only his second anywhere in the past thirty-five years. Domino was born Renaldo Jones, but his voice was considered so sweet that his friends looked to a sugar company for a nickname; word is, it hasn't lost any of its charm. (For more information about the party, visit www.myspace.com/digdeepernyc.)



The Easy Star All-Stars bring their show to the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill.

PATRICK LONG

GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (800-745-3000)—May 26: **Opeth** is a band from Sweden that embellishes its ornate death metal with rich orchestral flourishes. Unlike the majority of their contemporaries, Opeth aren't happy to simply play minor power chords and chortle into the microphone like Cookie Monster. Their albums are ambitious, edging ever so close to progressive rock.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—May 26: The Scottish-born singer, writer, and all-round rabble-rouser Nick Currie took his alias, **Momus,** from the Greek god of criticism and mockery. He lists Rabelais and Martial among his songwriting influences (with a smattering of Matthew Barney and Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange"), and his music—from Brecht to Beck on Moog and simulated harpsichord—is challenging. Heard live, his obscurities coalesce and his sharp wit and smooth rap seduce. He's calling this show, his first in New York in a few years, a Momuthon, which in plain English translates as a career retrospective. May 26: The **Roots** take over later that night. So far, the most compelling reason to tune in to Jimmy Fallon's "Late Night" is to catch the show's house band, the legendary hip-hop-and-rap unit from Philadelphia. Even better is to see them here, where they're performing late-night jams with special guests on a regular basis.

JALOPY THEATRE
315 Columbia St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-395-3214)—May 21: A triple shot of honky-tonk, with the locals **Andy Friedman** (a contributor to this magazine) and **Jack Grace** (a.k.a. the Martini Cowboy) and the legendary Texan **Wayne (the Train) Hancock,** who is cut from the same cloth as the country kingpins Ernest Tubb, Little Jimmie Dickens, and Hank Williams, Sr.

UNION HALL
702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-638-4400)—May 20: The **Duke & the King** are Simone Felice, of the Felice Brothers—a popular roots band from the Catskills—and Robert (Chicken) Burke, a drummer who has worked with George Clinton and Toshi Reagon. Their name comes from "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"; the pair's début studio album, "Nothing Gold Can Stay," is due out this August. May 21: The **Black Swans,** a Midwestern indie-folk quartet, celebrates a shared vinyl release with the local Ukrainian-born singer-songwriter **Alina Simone.** Hailing from Columbus, Ohio, the Black Swans specialize in sad, fragile songs driven by bandleader Jerry DeCicca's disarming lyrics. This performance marks their first in New York since the death of Noel Sayre, their talented violist and violinist, last July. Simone, an overtly passionate songwriter, is equally comfortable performing the anthemic Russian songs of Yanka Dyagileva, a Siberian punk icon, as she is singing her own, more haunting, material.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 23: **Maude Maggart,** the sultry and sweet-voiced sister of the pop star Fiona Apple, performs songs by Sondheim, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Gershwin, among others, backed by **John Boswell,** on piano, and **Yair Evnine,** on cello and guitar.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 20-23: **Nicholas Payton** first arrived among a fecund generation of trumpeters—including Roy Hargrove and Marcus Printup—who have evolved before our eyes. Having delved into everything from traditional New Orleans jazz to neo-R. & B., he is a hard-blowing crowd-pleaser.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 19-24: Since coming to national attention in the mid-fifties, the pianist **Ahmad Jamal** has morphed from the suave minimalist of "Poinciana" fame to a fascinating eccentric.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through May 30: **Judy Collins** has made a seamless transition from folk deity to cabaret icon. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 19-24 and May 26-31: The **Bill Charlap** trio. Working in spruce synchronicity with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington,** the pianist Charlap is deftly stepping into the shoes of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan.

FRANKIE'S BIRTHDAY FESTIVAL
Frankie Manning, who died a few weeks ago, was the man who sent the Lindy Hop airborne. In recent years, he served as the dance's chief ambassador, and he had planned to observe his ninety-fifth birthday by squiring ninety-five women across the dance floor. From May 21-25, more than three thousand swing dancers from thirty countries celebrate his life. In addition to nearly non-stop dancing to live swing bands at venues around town, the festival includes a stage show

honoring Manning, and an attempt, in Central Park on May 22 at 12:30, to set a world record for the most couples dancing at once. (For more information, visit www.frankie95.com.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 21-24: "Finger Poppin: A Tribute to Horace Silver." For a man who helped create and later codify hard bop, the pianist Horace Silver hardly gets his due these days. This is rectified in part here by a quintet featuring the pianist **Michael Weiss,** the saxophonist **Eric Alexander,** and two Silver alumni, the trumpeters **Tom Harrell** and, only on the 24th, **Randy Brecker.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 21-24: The swinging West Coast-based singer **Paula West** returns with the pianist **George Mesterhazy** and his quartet.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—May 21: The trumpeter **Brian Lynch** presents his "Unsung Heroes" project, which revives compositions from Howard McGhee, Idrees Sulieman, and other undervalued jazz trumpeters. May 23: **Ned Goold,** a standout saxophone soloist who has played with Harry Connick, Jr., leads a trio. Later that night, another quality saxophonist, **Sherman Irby,** fronts a quartet.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 19-24: In one of the smartest jazz bookings in quite some time, the New Orleans pianist and all-around musical avatar **Allen Toussaint** (an early R. & B. performer, he went on to produce Dr. John's "Right Place Wrong Time," Labelle's "Lady Marmalade," and many other songs) brings in a sextet to promote his simmering new album, "Bright Mississippi." The band includes such luminaries as the guitarist **Marc Ribot,** the clarinetist **Don Byron,** and trumpeter **Christian Scott.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective."** Opens May 20. ♦ **"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** The verisimilitude of Paine's earlier works—stainless-steel trees installed in Central Park, a weed-choked garden inside a gallery—gives way here to an allusive, rhizomatic wonder. Seven tons of steel pipes burrow into granite, snake through the air, and sprawl the full length of the museum's roof. Paine cites computer networks and the Tunguska Event, a 1908 meteor strike in Siberia, as inspirations, but the more recent phenomenon of systems (banking, the auto industry) gone kerflooey is also evoked. But despite its intimation of disaster, the piece is every bit as playful as the Jeff Koons balloon puppy that occupied the same spot last year. On a recent visit, a guard warned a young patron testing the art's playground potential, "It's all right to touch, but don't hang." Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion."** Through Aug. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel."** Through June 15. ♦ **"Aernout Mik."** Through July 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Through July 19. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward."** Through Aug. 23. ♦ **"Learning by Doing."** Through Aug. 23. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films."** Through Aug. 30. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen: The Music Room."** Through Aug. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Glamour plus endurance equals feminism, or so one might conclude after viewing some of the work in this excellent show of videos by nine young women artists (including a pair of collaborative duos). Kate Gilmore lifts seventy-five-pound plaster blocks and Stanya Kahn goes at a hill in L.A. with a weed whacker—both while wearing high heels. Cathy Begien and Klara Liden add a dose of ambiguity and machismo to female representation, as does Shannon Plumb, with her Chaplinesque slapstick. The personal is satirically political in Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy's newscasts for a fictional television station ("WKRH: Pregnant with Information") and Jen DeNike offers a five-word critique of fairy-tale femininity—and a riff on Bob Dylan's famous sequence in "Don't Look Back"—shuffling cue cards that read "there are no happy endings." Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

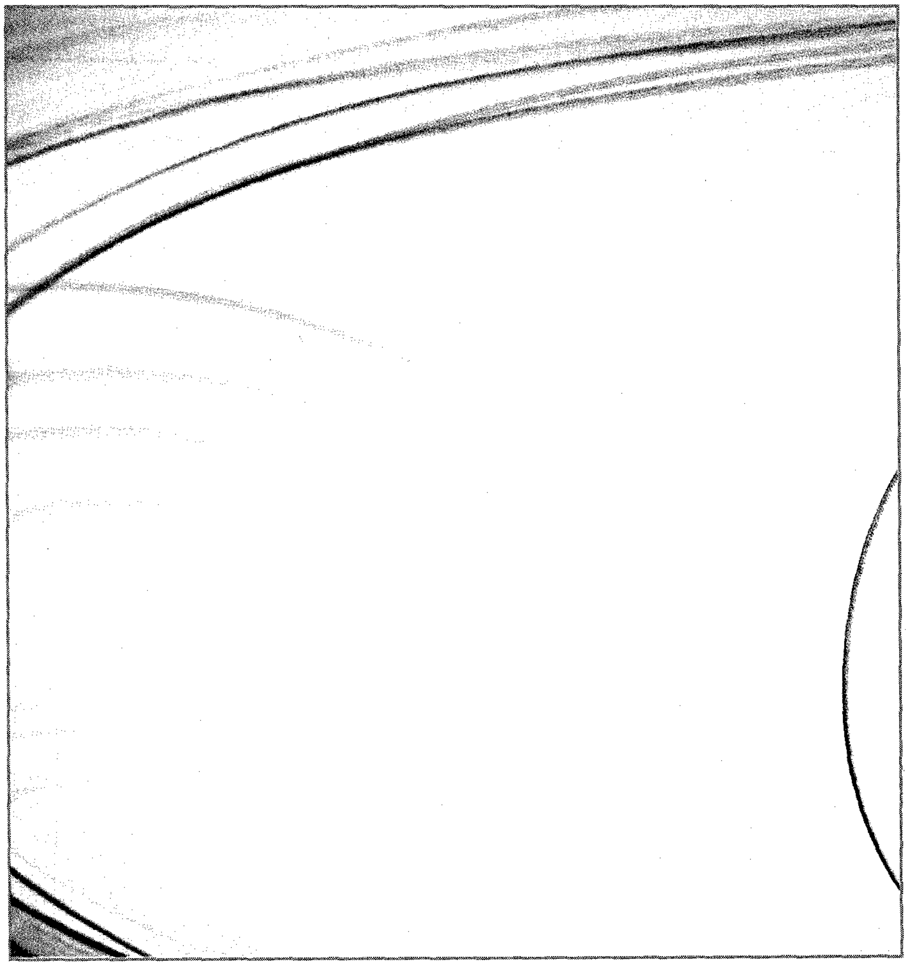
CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
556 W. 22nd St. (212-255-0719)—**"Modern Modern."** Through June 13. (Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Design for a Living World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Unica Zürn: Dark Spring."** Through July 23. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Avedon Fashion 1944-2000."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"David Seidner: Paris Fashions, 1945."** Through Sept. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EQUAL MEASURES

Leonard Freed (1929-2006) was one of the six photographers first identified as "concerned" by Cornell Capa. Like André Kertész, Werner Bischof, and Capa's brother Robert, Freed was an artist with a deeply humanist bent—an engaged photojournalist, never a dispassionate observer. The best evidence of his concern may be his 1968 book, "Black in White America," the subject of a timely exhibition at the Silverstein gallery. Freed travelled throughout the segregated South, but only occasionally worked the front lines of the civil-rights struggle. He was more interested in the lives of the ordinary black Americans he photographed under a gospel tent, at a beauty pageant, through the spray of a fire hydrant, or in jail. Seen today, the pictures reinforce the value (artistic, political, psychological) of Freed's sympathetic white viewpoint while raising questions about its limitations. Much has changed, but Freed's photographs capture something enduring: a spirit and strength that continue to remake America.

—*Vince Aletti*

LEONARD FREED, "BLACK IN WHITE AMERICA, NEW YORK, 1963"/COURTESY SILVERSTEIN GALLERY

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker.*"** Through May 24. ♦ **"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus."** Through June 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Harlem 1970-2009: Photographs by Camilo José Vergara."** Through July 12. ♦ **"Landmarks of New York."** Through July 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
32-01 Vernon Blvd., at Broadway, Long Island City (718-956-1819)—**"State Fair."** Through Aug. 2. (Daily, 10 to sunset.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Through June 28. ♦ **"Collected: Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN THE AMERICAS"
In 1859, the French adventurer Désiré Charnay travelled to Chichen Itza to photograph the Mayan temples there. He waited six months while the brush and vines were cleared away, then took the remarkable pictures exhibited here. Charnay's photographs of elaborately carved stone facades are extraordinary and matter-of-fact—documents that record both the weeds sprouting from cracks and the haunted aura of the sites. His images are the oldest in this group of photographs of pre-Columbian ruins; Marilyn Bridges took the most recent in 1989. Also included are works by Martin Chambi, Edward Weston, and Laura Gilpin, each of whom, like Charnay, temper awe with art and skill. Through June 20. (Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 212-223-1059.)

Short List

CAROL BOVE: The Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St. 212-757-0915. Through Sept. 10. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through June 20. **ERNESTO NETO:** Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-616-3930. Through June 14. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through May 30. **SIGMAR POLKE:** Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through June 19. **MIMMO ROTELLA:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through July 31. **ANRI SALA / YANG FUDONG:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 20.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MARCO BREUER
Breuer's photographic abstractions have always been process-driven, and his new pieces, most made without a camera, have been variously shot through, scraped along the floor, or abraded while spinning on a turntable. The evidence of these actions—punctures, scratches, flares—is often right there on the surface of the photo paper he uses as raw material, but that doesn't make the work any less mysterious and wonderful. Breuer nods to minimalism with a solid black square, a creamy white Polaroid, and a circle drilled through the paper, but he's most exciting when the work feels out of control, like blades of grass in a whirlwind. Through June 13. (Von Lintel, 520 W. 23rd St. 212-242-0599.)

SOPHIE CALLE
Conceptual art meets chick lit in Calle's installation "Take Care of Yourself," for which the French artist enlisted the aid of a hundred and seven women (and one female parrot) in analyzing a solipsistic break-up e-mail from a former lover. ("It's not you, it's me—and all the other women" might sum up its contents.) Each participant was invited to interpret the note in her own fashion: a marksman uses it as a target, a copy editor corrects the grammar, a ballerina dances a scalding solo. The salon-style installation includes videos, photographs, and artifacts but is heavy on text (translated for those who need to bone up on their high-school French). But for all its galling self-absorption, Calle's project transcends its essentialist "sisterhood is powerful" theme to acknowledge that there is no simple or singular perspective on heartache. Through June 6. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

NIGEL COOKE
Cooke is yet another British enlistee in the painting-is-dead-long-live-painting corps. If his technically show-offy pictures of sad-clownish men in melancholy landscapes were a book, it might be titled "Peter Doig for Dummies." His small bronzes of sad-clownish heads, cast from assemblages of woebegone stuffs and objects, exude a generic air of lumpen Surrealism. Cooke's original quality is a poetic tone—rambunctious dreariness, perhaps—that is likable if you like it. Through May 30. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

STAN GAZ
Gaz's big black-and-white aerial photographs of meteor-impact sites in Namibia, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere appear prehistoric; with the exception of a crater in Arizona and its attendant industrial sprawl, there are no signs of human habitation. Or maybe these images anticipate the end of history, a time when the earth returns to moonlike desolation, its skies black and its barren surface gouged. Gaz's decidedly lunar landscapes may not be sci-fi fantasies—he took them hanging out of a hovering helicopter—but they're almost unrecognizable as our home planet. Magnificent and frightening, they suggest an abrupt beginning and a shattering end. Through June 6. (ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

KEIKO NARAHASHI
Ceramics, once considered the country cousin of the visual arts, has been enjoying an art-world upgrade of late. (Anyone in Philadelphia should catch "Dirt on Delight: Impulses That Form Clay" at the I.C.A., before it closes on June 21.) Narahashi joins the ranks of Nicole Cherubini, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, and Arlene Shechet with her witty ceramic works that suggest shadows—or objects that have crossed paths with a cartoon anvil. The silhouette-like "Flat Chair" hangs on a wall, near "Flat Shoe," on the floor. A table lined with bottles is a homespun homage to the still-lifes of Giorgio Morandi. There's a winsome air to the work, which avoids being too cute thanks to the artist's simple and ingenious approach. Through June 6. (Hudson Franklin, 508 W. 26th St. 212-741-1189.)

Short List

ALICE ATTIE: Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081. Through May 23. **SARAH CHARLESWORTH:**

Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through June 13. **LEONARD FREED:** Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through June 13. **HUANG YONG PING:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through July 31. **ALEX KATZ:** Pace Wildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through June 13. **YAYOI KUSAMA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 27. **CHRIS MARKER:** Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through July 31. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through June 20. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **CHARLES RAY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through June 27. **LARA SCHNITGER:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through June 20. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through June 13. **BILLY SULLIVAN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through June 6. **CHEYNEY THOMPSON:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through June 20.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"OLD DOGS, NEW TRICKS"
The dogs in question are the veteran New York artists R. M. Fischer, Hermine Ford, and John Newman; the tricks are shifts in approach or materials. Fischer, best known for his use of industrial parts, now sews colorful vinyl sculptures that hint at oddball utility and animality (one conjures up both a giant hand mixer and a stuffed elephant). Ford's paintings, which are often on big shaped panels, are diminutive in this show—bright, fragmented abstractions in oil, gouache, and pencil on canvas, based on Roman mosaics. Newman, once known for the large-scale and totemic, has, of late, mastered the polychrome arabesque, concocting tabletop objects (like the helix of blackened aluminum nuggets, rising from a spiral of little pink bricks) that are more haiku than sculpture. Through May 30. (K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918.)

Short List

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through May 30. **VERNE DAWSON:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through June 20. **LIZ DESCHENES:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through June 14. **ALBERTO GIACOMETTI:** Freeman, 560 Broadway at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through June 27. **SCOTT GRODESKY:** Sunday L.E.S., 237 Eldridge St. 212-253-0700. Through June 14. **KARL HAENDEL:** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through June 20. **MICHELLE HANDELMAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through May 31. **JUTTA KOETHER:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through May 24. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through June 13. **CARRIE MOYER:** Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631. Through June 7. **MATT SHERIDAN SMITH:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through May 24. **BANKS VIOLETTE:** Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through June 20.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
New York's two ballet companies go head to head at Lincoln Center: on Saturday, they will both perform Balanchine's sumptuous "Allegro Brillante," about which the choreographer said, "It contains everything I know about the classical ballet in thirteen minutes." Also this week, "A Simple Symphony," the charmingly neoclassical Britten ballet created last season by Melissa Barak, a former N.Y.C.B. dancer, is paired with Robbins's delightful Verdi fantasy "The Four Seasons." Thursday is the season's last performance of Peter Martins's brisk, ruthless "Romeo + Juliet" (a performance that will also be broadcast live on PBS). ♦ May 19 at 7:30 and May 21 at 8: "Romeo + Juliet." ♦ May 20 at 7:30 and May 23 at 2: "Allegro Brillante," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ May 22 at 8: "Scotch Symphony," "Quasi una Fantasia," and "Concerto DSCH." ♦ May 23 at 8: "Toccata," "After the Rain," and "Chaconne." ♦ May 24 at 3: "Concerto DSCH," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ May 26 at 7:30: "Allegro Brillante," "Quasi una Fantasia," and "Scotch Symphony." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 21.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
New Yorkers are getting a double helping of Balanchine this week (see above): in addition to A.B.T.'s New York company première of "Allegro Brillante" (staged by the former N.Y.C.B. dancer Darla Hoover), the group's all-Balanchine, all-Tchaikovsky program includes "Mozartiana," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Theme and Variations." The newly promoted Veronika Part, a dancer of great emotional impact, will perform "Mozartiana" with Maxim Beloserkovsky on Tuesday, Friday, and the Saturday matinée; the imposing Nina Ananiashvili, partnered by the much-loved Angel Corella, will perform it on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. The diminutive, spectacular Daniil Simkin will be Xiomara Reyes's cavalier in "Allegro Brillante" at the Wednesday and Saturday matinées. Casts appear on the company's Web site. ♦ May 19 and May 21 at 7:30, May 20 at 2 and 7:30, May 22 at 8, May 23 at 2 and 8, and May 25 at 2: "Allegro Brillante," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Mozartiana," and "Theme and Variations." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 11.)

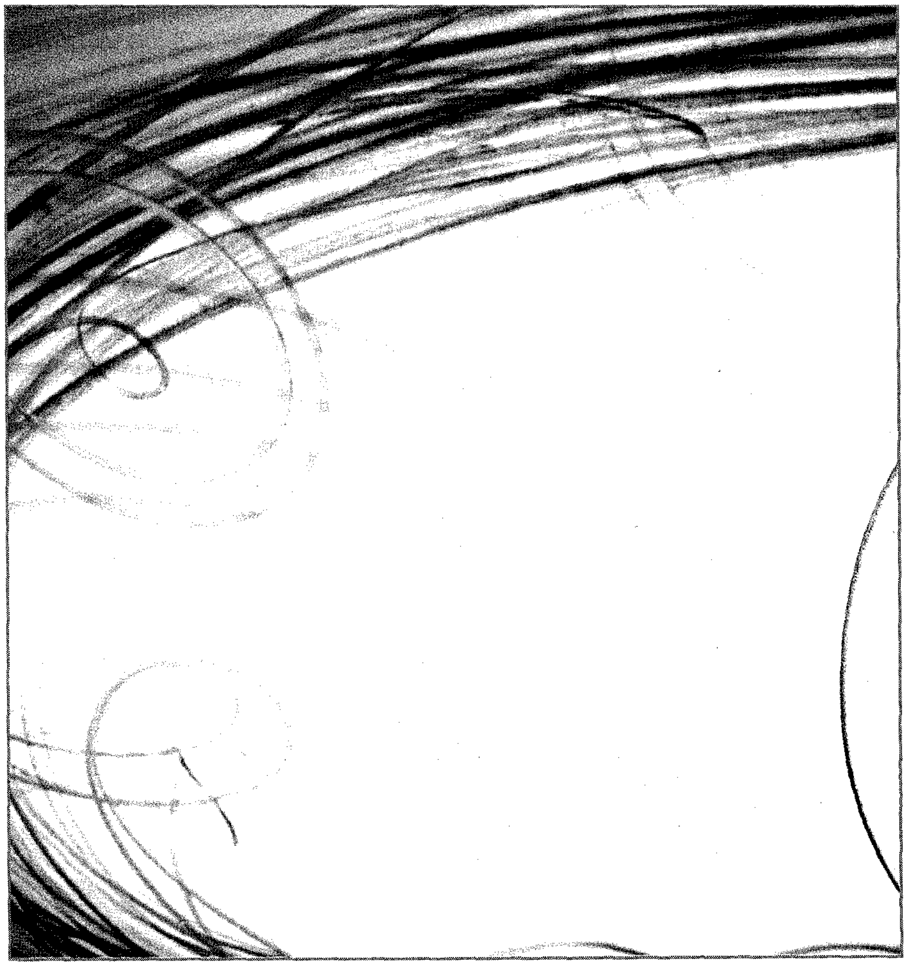
MOMIX
"Go green" is the message of "Botanica," Moses Pendleton's newest work for his troupe of illusionist dancers, at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 19-20 and May 26 at 7:30, May 21-22 at 8, May 23 at 2 and 8, and May 24 at 2 and 7:30. Through May 31.)

WENDY OSSERMAN DANCE COMPANY
"More Is More Is More or Less" extends the recent collaboration between the veteran choreographer and the Czech vocalist, actor, composer, and commanding stage presence Iva Bittová. Bittová sings her own settings of Gertrude Stein texts while Osserman's four dancers act out paintings by Picasso and Matisse. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. May 21-24 at 8.)

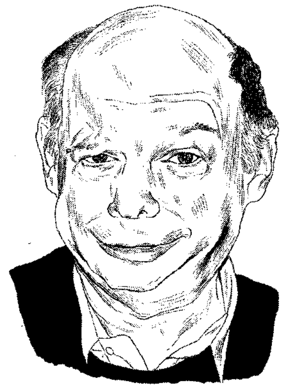
DAVID DORFMAN DANCE
Sections of Dorfman's "Disavowal" engage explicitly with the topic of race: voice-overs about chosen and unchosen racial identity, an argument between dancers about racial guilt. Other parts are more indirect: an aerobics class, a treacly thread about an overbearing "Papa" figure. Various audience participation gambits culminate in something like a danced twelve-step meeting. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. May 21-24 at 8:30.)

DANCEAFRICA 2009
A recession-year reliance on American representatives of the African diaspora doesn't necessitate any loss of authenticity. Mouminatou Camara, the artistic director of the New York-based Seèwè African Dance Company, was a principal dancer with Guinea's Les Ballets Africans. The members of the D.C.-based dance-and-drum ensemble Farafina Kan are solid in African tradition and mix in a little hip-hop. And there isn't a finer example of how to merge African idioms and modern dance than Ronald K. Brown's Evidence. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 22 at 7:30, May 23 at 2 and 7:30, and May 24-25 at 3.)

TAP EXTRAVAGANZA
The annual event in which New York's metal-shoed clan honors its own tends to be a lengthy, slapdash affair, shot through with brilliance. This year's lineup—dedicated to Frankie Manning, who died just a few weeks before his ninety-fifth birthday celebration (see Night Life)—leans heavily on the usual suspects, including the ever-feisty octogenar-



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EARLY SHAWN



ANDY FRIEDMAN

For years, we heard about Wallace Shawn's pre-"Aunt Dan and Lemon" plays. But if you happened to miss "Our Late Night" (1975) or "A Thought in Three Parts" (1977), then all you could do was imagine what other theatregoers were talking about when the subject turned to Shawn's propensity for making contemplation the primary activity on whatever stage his casts traversed. In life, no one talks as they do in a Shawn play, but after reading, or seeing, one, you're more apt to: he gives clear voice to the process of intellection. The Theatre Communications Group has published a book of those two works, and this month, Shawn himself appears in his latest play, "Grasses of a Thousand Colours," at the Royal Court, in London. Directed by his "My Dinner with Andre" collaborator, Andre Gregory, the play—which also stars Miranda Richardson and Jennifer Tilly—is bound to delve further into the world that Shawn began to explore so precipitously nearly thirty-five years ago: one filled with ideas, wherein the action is the domestication of cruelty.

—*Hilton Als*

ian Mable Lee. Watch out for the Edwards kids, the adorable progeny of the tap super-couple Omar and Dormeshia Edwards. (Haft Auditorium, 227 W. 27th St. 718-232-1852. May 24 at 7.)

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM"
A little in advance of the season, the Baryshnikov Arts Center treats ballet fans to a rare screening of Balanchine's version of Shakespeare's comedy. The 1966 film was shot in a studio, not a theatre, with most of the original, unparalleled cast: Edward Villella as Oberon, Arthur Mitchell as Puck, and the headlong Suzanne Farrell as Titania. Farrell participates in a Q. & A. afterward. (450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. May 26 at 7.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

COLLEGIATE CHORALE: "ALCESTE"
Gluck, the great transitional genius between Baroque and classical opera, is on a roll here in Gotham, with performances of "Orfeo ed Euridice" and "Iphigénie en Tauride" gracing the Met's stage in recent seasons. The Chorale's latest opera-in-concert—the first New York performance of this opera since 1982—offers some genuine post-season glamour, with Deborah Voigt making her role début as Alceste (opposite the tenor Vinson Cole, as King Admète) and George Manahan leading the New York City Opera Orchestra. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. May 26 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The Philharmonic's free Memorial Day concerts at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine are a fine tradition of nearly two decades' standing, but this year's event is especially attractive: the repairs required after the 2001 fire have been completed, and the entire sanctuary of the magnificent building will be open for seating. The program is noble and salubrious: Ives's "The Unanswered Question," Barber's Adagio for Strings, Vaughan Williams's rhapsodic "The Lark Ascending" (with the violinist Karen Gomyo), and Messiaen's worshipful "L'Ascension." (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. May 25 at 8. No tickets required.)

BAMBERG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Nott made a reputation as a first-class new-music traffic cop (making magnificent recordings of Ligeti's orchestral music with the Berlin Philharmonic, for example) as he climbed the more conventional conductorial ladder. Since 2000 he has been the principal conductor of this distinguished Bavarian ensemble, which he leads with a firmly literalist approach; their touring programs, offered in collaboration with the scintillating pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, feature robust repertory by Debussy and two composers he decisively influenced. May 20 at 8: Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune," Stravinsky's "Symphonies of Wind Instruments," and Bartók's First and Third Piano Concertos. ♦ May 21 at 8: "La Mer," Bartók's Second Piano Concerto, and "The Rite of Spring." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA
James Levine, leading the fabulous orchestra's final Carnegie Hall concert of the season, offers a program of vigorous opposites—the grand and burly Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor by Johannes Brahms (with the electric Lang Lang) and the 1947 version of Stravinsky's acerbic ballet "Petrushka." (212-247-7800. May 21 at 8.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "THE WELCOME SHORE"
Three outstanding singers—Sasha Cooke (from the Met), Michelle Areyzaga, and Philip Cutlip—are featured in the ensemble's final concert of the season, a celebration of oceans and rivers (and, one suspects, love) through songs by Schubert, Stenhammar, Elgar, Fauré, John Musto, and Noël Coward, among others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 19 and May 21 at 8.)

THE SYLVAN WINDS: "NIGHTS IN BARCELONA"
As part of the "Catalan Days" festival, the admired woodwind quintet collaborates with the pianist Douglas Riva in performances of music by such composers as Manuel Oltra, Joan Guinjoan, and Xavier Montsalvatge, the doyen of Barcelona's postwar music scene. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-222-3569. May 20 at 8.)

"KEYS TO THE FUTURE"
Joseph Rubenstein's annual celebration of the contemporary piano concludes a three-night run with two concerts that feature performances from such front-rank soloists as Lisa Moore, Amy Briggs, Blair McMillen, and Stephen Gosling. May 20 at 8: Music by a diverse group that includes Lois Vierk, Lowell Liebermann (the Nocturne No. 3), Fred Hersch, and William Bolcom ("Poltergeist," a "rag fantasy"). ♦ May 21 at 8: Works by Howard Skempton, John Corigliano ("Étude Fantasy"), Daniel Felsenfeld, and Henry Martin (Two Preludes and Fugues, from 1988). (Renee Weiler Concert Hall, 46 Barrow St. Tickets at the door.)

BARGEMUSIC
May 22 at 8: In the latest installment of the floating chamber-music series' invigorating "Here and Now" series, the pianist Katya Mihailova and the percussionist Alex Lipowski perform music by the venerable modernists Charles Dodge ("Any Resemblance Is Purely Coincidental"), John Cage (selections from Volume II of "Music for Prepared Piano"), and Charles Wuorinen. ♦ May 23 at 8 and May 24 at 3: The classical tradition returns via the violinist Mark Peskanov and friends, who offer a concentrated program of works by Bach, Beethoven (the String Trio in G Major, Op. 9, No. 1), and Fauré (the Piano Quartet in C Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NICK HALLETT: "VOICE & LIGHT SYSTEMS"
Hallett, given a monthlong residency at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, devotes four concerts to composers who specialize in joining the primal power of the human voice to the latest innovations of technology. After focussing on works by Stockhausen and Meredith Monk, he uses this week's concert as a platform for a new work of his own, "Whispering Exercises," for women's voices, harp (Shelley Burgon), and electronics. (235 Bowery. www.newmuseum.org. May 21 at 7.)

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE: "NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND OTHER LIVE ACTS"
Some artists communicate their intentions in neon lights, lest we miss them. "Thirteen Near-Death Experiences," a new piece of music theatre by Corey Dargel, seems to be a departure from his well-established (and cunningly made) mock-trivial art-pop style. It will be the major offering in a concert by the stunningly expert new-music band that also features three other world-première scores, by the young composer-performers Stephen Lehman, Nathan Davis, and Mario Diaz de León. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. May 22-23 at 8.)

RESPECT SEXTET: MUSIC BY STOCKHAUSEN AND SUN RA
"Space Is the Place," quoth Sun Ra, and Karlheinz Stockhausen would probably have agreed. The exciting free-jazz combo celebrates the music of two fantastical modern-music masters at (Le) Poisson Rouge; the Jack Quartet opens the show, performing music by Webern and Josquin. (158 Bleecker St. May 24 at 7:30. For tickets and full schedule, see www.lprnyc.com.)

OSSIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: MUSIC BY ANDRÉ PREVIN
Perhaps (Le) Poisson Rouge is the ideal place for an André Previn tribute concert, since the composer-conductor himself easily bestrides the jazz and classical worlds. Members of the young-professionals chamber orchestra offer "The Invisible Drummer," the Sonata for Violin and Piano ("Vineyard"), the "Vocalise," and "Diversions"; the violinist Lara St. John and the soprano Heather Buck are featured guests. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. May 26 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BURMA VJ
A documentary, directed by Anders Østergaard, about underground video journalists who defy the regime in Burma. In English and Burmese. Opening May 20. (Film Forum.)

DANCE FLICK
Damien Dante Wayans directed this parody, about teens from opposite sides of town who become dance partners. Starring Damon Wayans, Jr., Craig Wayans, and Shoshana Bush. Opening May 22. (In wide release.)

EASY VIRTUE
An adaptation of Noël Coward's play, in which an American woman marries an Englishman and deflates his parents' pomposity. Directed by Stephan Elliott; starring Jessica Biel, Ben Barnes, Kristin Scott Thomas, and Colin Firth. Opening May 22. (In limited release.)

GHOSTS OF THE HEARTLAND
In this drama, set in the nineteen-fifties, a Chinese-American journalist returns to his home town to investigate a mysterious suicide. Directed by Allen Blumberg. Opening May 22. (Quad Cinema.)

THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE
Steven Soderbergh directed this drama, about the romantic and economic challenges facing a call girl (Sasha Grey). Opening May 22. (In limited release.)

MILTON GLASER: TO INFORM & DELIGHT
Wendy Keys directed this documentary portrait of the graphic artist. Opening May 22. (Cinema Village.)

NEW WORLD ORDER
A documentary, directed by Andrew Neel and Luke Meyer, about an alleged global anarchist plot. Opening May 22. (Cinema Village.)

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN
Ben Stiller stars in this children's comedy, about a museum guard who sneaks into the Smithsonian to save two miniature friends who were shipped there by mistake. Directed by Shawn Levy; co-starring Owen Wilson, Amy Adams, and Robin Williams. Opening May 22. (In wide release.)

O'HORTEN
Bent Hamer directed this comedy, about an engineer who misses his train and stumbles into strange adventures. In Norwegian. Opening May 15. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

TERMINATOR SALVATION
McG directed this apocalyptic action drama, about survivors of a nuclear catastrophe who attempt to rescue the remnants of humanity. Starring Christian Bale, Sam Worthington, and Anton Yelchin. Opening May 21. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

ALEXANDRA
To describe the entire plot of Alexander Sokurov's 2007 film is to give little away. The title character, an elderly widow (played by the great opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya, Mstislav Rostropovich's widow), travels from St. Petersburg to a Russian Army base in Chechnya, where her grandson Denis (Vasily Shevtsov), a captain, is stationed. There, she sees and endures the rigors of barracks life, then wanders off the base and meets an old townswoman who invites her to her home—an apartment building that, like all the others, has been shattered in attacks by the Russian Army. Alexandra then returns to the base and begins the trip home. Her travels are Sokurov's pretext for a quasi-documentary report on the state of things in Chechnya and their effect on life in Russia: he finds the soldiers to be despondent, guilt-ridden, and alienated, and the Chechens victimized, uncomprehending, and desperate. Though he fudges enough facts to avoid being put on a Russian enemies' list, and evokes, in the relationship of grandmother and grandson, emotional scars that transcend politics, the simple comparison of the intact base and the destroyed town makes for a powerful accusation and a heartfelt elegy. In Russian and Chechen.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; May 21 and May 23.)

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL
Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, which was founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any Druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/20/09.) (In limited release.)

BURNT BY THE SUN
Set in 1936, in the high summer of Stalinist rule, Nikita Mikhalkov's movie centers on a Soviet Army colonel (played by Mikhalkov) and the family group that circulates around him in an idyllic dacha. The idyll cracks when the state, in the person of a family friend (Oleg Menchikov), comes to wreak havoc; a work that began in the rustling spirit of Chekhov ends like a Scorsese picture, with thugs raining blows in the back of a car. What binds the mixture is Mikhalkov's love of all the stray details his camera catches; the movie may sound dispiriting, but it has an amazing ability to cheer you up. There is a full range of acting styles, from the florid to the cartoonish, and to the sharp-eyed, wholly uncute performance of the director's eight-year-old daughter, Nadia, who gazes at the unfolding events with the air of one who will never be able to banish them from her memory. In Russian. Released in 1995.—*A.L.* (5/8/95) (Anthology Film Archives; May 23-24.)

IL DIVO
An elegant reunion for Paolo Sorrentino and Toni Servillo, the director and the star of "The Consequences of Love." In this case, the phlegmatic Servillo plays Giulio Andreotti—seven times Prime Minister of Italy, and an inextinguishable force at the heart of the country's politics. Try to imagine Nosferatu on the threshold of the Vatican and you come close to the bewitching figure that Servillo delivers here; he appears to glide rather than walk, to scorn minor sins in favor of larger conspiracy, and to taste each occurrence (even when it threatens his own position) for its comic savor. By the end, you can't say you know him, but you can't get enough of him, either. The movie that spins around him feels, perhaps unavoidably, less refined; Sorrentino flourishes the secondary characters in style, but he allows the complexities of parliamentary scheming—and of Andreotti's reputed links to the Mafia—to splinter into fast, unmanageable fragments. If we can't hope to be enlightened, he seems to suggest, we might as well be dazed and confused. In Italian.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

FIGHTING
As a picture about the sullen art of bare-knuckle boxing—scratch-and-claw combat without rules—it's a fake. The movie's language is chaste, and the fights, staged in back alleys, hidden rooms, and half-finished apartments, may look violent at first

glance, but the actual blows and the pain of battle are hidden by tricky editing or just ignored. The hero, Shawn MacArthur (Channing Tatum), after being thrown down on cement and flung against display cases and whatever other furniture happens to be around, shows up the next day with no more than a few decorative bruises on his face. Still, it's a decent commercial entertainment. The independent-film director Dito Montiel ("A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints"), who wrote "Fighting" with Robert Munic, is from New York, and he has a feel for the hostile atmosphere of the after-hours city—the plug-ugly types lounging outside of some crooked convenience store; the furtive activity of fight-scene hustlers, brokers, and middle men; the fey, knowing sarcasm of the professional gamblers. With Terrence Howard as a saddened, philosophical street operator named Harvey Boarden, a gent who barely survives in the urban muck, and Zulay Henao as the vulnerable young single mother the hero falls for.—*David Denby* (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE

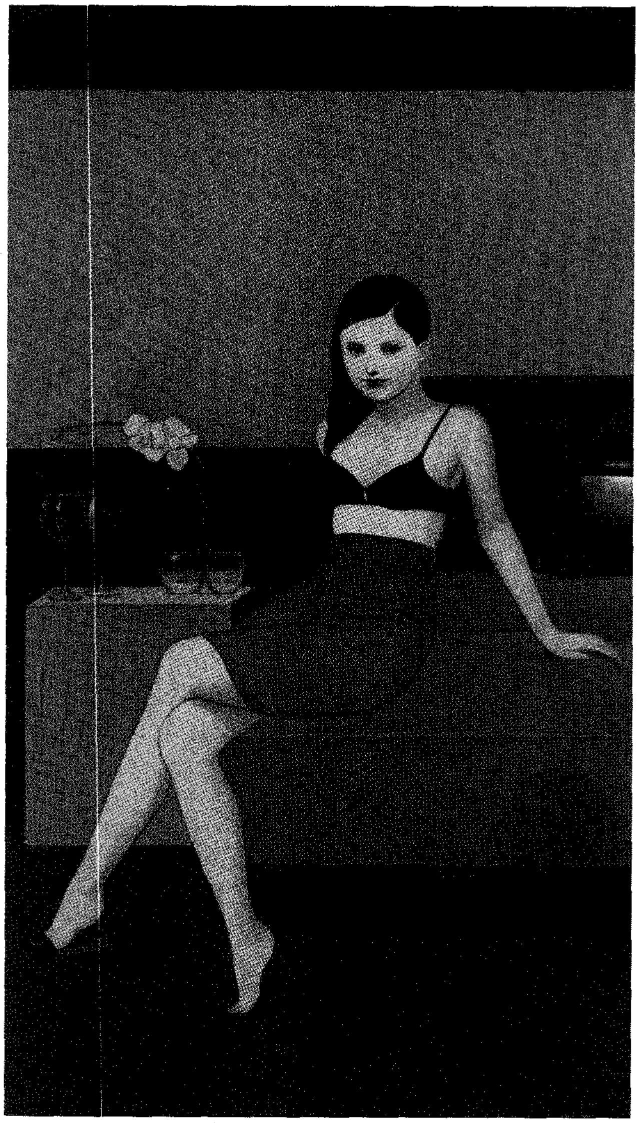
Boston Irish crooks and cops. Robert Mitchum is the aging hood, Eddie Coyle, who is slipping a little information to a smart, treacherous narcotics officer (Richard Jordan), in order to stay out of jail. Peter Boyle, a bartender, handles murder contracts and ruthlessly plays all sides against each other. Based on the novel by George V. Higgins, former assistant attorney general of Massachusetts, this movie should be better; the plot and the dialogue are first-rate. The elements are all there, and Mitchum, looking appropriately square-headed, tries hard and has some good scenes. But you get the impression that the dialogue is moving faster than the action. Probably this picture, directed by the English Peter Yates, needed an American director with an instinctive feeling for the milieu; the movie is shallow and a little mechanical, with noise and loud music used to build up excitement. The police and the gangsters have no roots, and intertwined roots are what the story is meant to be about. Jordan, acting chillingly pleasant, gives the most effective performance, and Steven Keats, as a gun dealer, gives the showiest one. Released in 1973.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 26.)

THE GREAT ESCAPE

One of the most energetic and enjoyable Hollywood movies of the pre-counterculture sixties, with Steve McQueen giving off a steady sizzle as a laconic American loner and madman motorcyclist (the role that defined his career). It's an exhilarating fact-based adventure about R.A.F.-led P.O.W.s who mount a mass exit from the Nazis' supposedly escape-proof Stalag Luft III. The director, John Sturges, reaches his peak both as a choreographer of big-screen action (he shoots the nightmarish tunnel scenes in dramatically detailed wide angles) and a molder of dynamic masculine personality. He and his screenwriters (James Clavell and W. R. Burnett) give everyone in the escape plan a glittering shard of personality, from Richard Attenborough's vengeance-streaked ringleader Big X to James Garner's wily "scrounger," Charles Bronson's claustrophobic tunneller, and Donald Pleasence's gentle forger. Together they're part men's club and part mob—and the sight of good guys working illicitly and often irreverently saves the movie from phony uplift. With scene-stealers like James Coburn, David McCallum, and Gordon Jackson filling out the cast, the film is a genuine (and rare) action ensemble piece. Released in 1963.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 24-25.)

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL

The end credits of the new Jim Jarmusch film read like paintings in a catalogue: "Nude," "Blonde," "Lone Man," and so on: an appropriate echo, since the movie itself is sprinkled with works of art, most of them studied on the walls of Spanish galleries by the loner at its center. As played by Isaach De Bankolé, he has no name but, by way of compensation, does have a fine selection of suits, in which he travels to Madrid, Seville, and elsewhere, hooking up with mysterious contacts, exchanging codes and diamonds, and gradually inching toward his ultimate (and surprisingly violent) task. The cityscapes, in particular, are shot with acuity and wit by the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who pushes them to the brink of abstraction, and the supporting cast, which includes Gael García Bernal, Bill Murray, and Tilda Swinton, could hardly be hipper, or more tuned in to the styles of movies past. The only question is: when a film about a cool fellow, on a cool mission, looks this cool, what is to prevent it from freezing into a series of attitudes? Jarmusch lacks for nothing in his deadpan pastiche of spy thrillers, but some viewers may experience a residual, vulgar longing for the real thing. And you can't blame them.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (In limited release.)



"The Girlfriend Experience" opens May 22.

PIERRE MORNET

MANAGEMENT

After small, precise turns in two other films this year ("The Great Buck Howard," "Sunshine Cleaning"), the great Steve Zahn gets a co-starring role, with Jennifer Aniston, in this slacker-like romantic comedy by the playwright Stephen Belber. Aniston plays Sue, a buttoned-down travelling saleswoman (she deals in decorative art), whose obsessions over charitable causes help spare her any emotional self-involvement. Zahn is Mike, a sweet, prospect-less manager who works at his parents' modest Arizona motel. When Sue checks into the motel, it's love at first sight for Mike, and he begins pursuing her on a cross-country trip to win her love. The film is indifferently shot and at times has the feel of a theatre production, but there's nice supporting work from Woody Harrelson (as Sue's punk ex-boyfriend) and Margo Martindale (playing Mike's mom) to liven things up. There's also an affecting low-key tempo to Belber's dialogue that allows Aniston to bring some honest, focussed attention to her role. But above all, it's Zahn's puppy-dog charm that keeps the film scampering about amiably.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

RED LINE 7000

Love and death among tough men in dangerous professions and the well-travelled women who are drawn to them had been Howard Hawks's main subject since the nineteen-twenties, but in this film, from 1965—his last in a contemporary setting—he stumbles on something that disturbs his long-established habits: the rapidly changing times. The story, about the romantic wranglings of a trio of stock-car racers on the Southern circuit, is mainly a string of erotic confrontations that mask vulnerability under pugnacious banter. But as the main character, the driver Mike Marsh, the young James Caan, in his first leading role, brings something new to the Hawksian universe: compressed, combustible neurosis, embedded in a Method-juiced bundle of tics and involutions. Such cognate period details as brassy Hollywood attempts at rock music, fashions that swing between 007 and bluejeans, and the culinary habits of the Pepsi Generation only heighten the contrast between Hawks's typical tight-lipped suaveness and the air of shambling confessionalism, with its implications of therapy and regression. The supercharged sexual ambiguities reach their apex in a stunning morning-after scene, filmed in a single, taut three-minute take, between a deflowered virgin (Laura Devon) and a swaggering rural stud (John Robert Crawford); it's one of the greatest bedroom moments ever filmed.—*R.B.* (BAM; May 20.)

SIN NOMBRE

This modest epic of immigration is heightened by the brilliant filmmaking of the director Cary Joji Fukunaga (it's his first feature film). The drama—featuring interwoven stories about Honduran teen-agers trying to emigrate to the U.S. by any means necessary (and ultimately facing off with Mexican gangs who rob and kill illegal immigrants on their way north)—is so vividly constructed that it achieves an almost thriller-like urgency. The cast of young, unknown actors (including Paulina Gaitan and Edgar Flores) is a gifted wild bunch, and the performances are rooted in a naturalistic display of emotions that never feels forced. The film is sometimes dark and brutal, but it has a measure of grace and classical composition (the wide-screen images are remarkable) that carry the story along to a moving conclusion. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (In limited release.)

THE SOLOIST

A star reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Downey approaches him with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much. Turning away, he talks rapidly and lightly, praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane, either, and the filmmakers—the screenwriter Susannah Grant (adapting Lopez's book) and the director Joe Wright—don't pretend that friendship can cure madness or that great music can heal wounds that have been open for years. Wright flies over L.A.'s tangled freeways like the angels hovering over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and he turns Nathaniel's attendance at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Philharmonic into a bliss-out. But then he comes back to earth. Outside a shelter, the director assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city and halts the story to let them tell their tales. They make their own kind of music. Most of the rest is from Beethoven's Third and Ninth Symphonies. It's hard to see how music and a sympathetic reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

STAR TREK

A new beginning, of sorts, for a franchise whose vision of the future seemed lost in the past. The director, J. J. Abrams, warps back to the early days not only of Kirk (Chris Pine) and Mr. Spock (Zachary Quinto) but of the U.S.S. Enterprise herself. Kirk overcomes his rebellious streak—signalled very clearly, for the hard of understanding—to take command of the ship as she flames into combat against the spidery craft of Captain Nero (Eric Bana), who has already jump-started the movie by wiping out Kirk's dad. There is no shortage of time-leaps here, including a jumbled subplot about what might have happened, which involves a longish cameo from a cadaverous Leonard Nimoy. (It's unclear whether non-devout viewers will relish his presence, given that Quinto does such a serene and thoughtful job.) The action scarcely halts for breath, let alone for common sense, and the scene of a ship-to-planet freefall already ranks among the treasures of the headlong; what the movie gains in ardor and cockiness, however, it loses in charm, and the result is much easier to gawp at than to love. With Bruce Greenwood, the nimble-witted Simon Pegg (in the role of Scotty), and a graying Winona Ryder as Spock's mother—how old does that make you feel?—*A.L.* (5/18/09) (In wide release.)

TYSON

After seeing this fascinating James Toback documentary about Mike Tyson, one can never again think of the fighter as a simpleminded thug. He's a very complex-minded thug indeed, full of contradictions, which he articulates with considerable detail and feeling. The man we see is sad and vulnerable and ferocious all at once—frightened as a virtually parentless boy in Brooklyn who was robbed by neighborhood kids, then remorseless as a baby gangster robbing drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he was steered into boxing and wound up in the hands of the great trainer Cus D'Amato, who took him in, fathered him, and got him to concentrate his strength and rage into a relentless attack in which speed—a hail of punches—drives through his opponents' defenses. The rest is bravado, boasting, good and bad times with many women and hangers-on, enormous earnings (most of them blown), and wrenching self-criticism and self-abnegation. Toback doesn't press Tyson on the rape conviction that sent him to prison for three years. (Tyson claims he was innocent.) He lets Tyson speak at great length, and we are free to judge the self-mythologizing, which, however overblown, cannot blur the genuinely tragic story of an ignorant street kid's precipitous rise and disastrous fall.—*D.D.* (5/11/09) (In limited release.)

THE WAGES OF FEAR

An existential thriller—the most original and shocking French melodrama of the fifties. The opening sequence shows us a verminous South American village and the Europeans trapped in it; they will risk everything for the money to get out. An oil well three hundred miles away has caught fire, and the oil company offers four of them two thousand dollars each to drive two trucks loaded with nitroglycerine (to explode out the fire) over primitive roads. The four are a Corsican (Yves Montand), a Frenchman (Charles Vanel), an Italian (Folco Lulli), and a German (Peter Van Eyck), and the film is about their responses to the gruelling test of driving the trucks. When you can be blown up at any moment only a fool believes that character determines fate. In this situation, courage and caution are almost irrelevant, and ordinary human responses are futile and archaic—yet nothing else is left. If this isn't a parable of man's position in the modern world, it's at least an illustration of it. Henri-Georges Clouzot directed his own adaptation of Georges Arnaud's novel. His most controversial film, it is also his most powerful. The violence is not used simply for excitement—it's used as in Eisenstein's and Buñuel's films: to force a vision of human experience. In French. Released in 1953.—*P.K.* (IFC Center; May 22-24.)

THE WARRIORS

Walter Hill's spectacle takes its story from Xenophon's "Anabasis" and its style from the taste of the modern urban dispossessed—in neon signs, graffiti, and the thrill of gaudiness. The film enters into the spirit of urban-male tribalism and the feelings of kids who believe that they own the streets because they keep other kids out of them. In this vision, cops and kids are all there is, and the worst crime is to be chicken. It has—in visual terms—the kind of impact that "Rock Around the Clock" had when it was played behind the titles of "Blackboard Jungle." It's like visual rock, and it's bursting with energy. The action runs from night until dawn, and most of it is in crisp, bright Day-Glo colors against the terrifying New York blackness; the figures stand out like a jukebox in a dark bar. There's a night-blooming, psychedelic shine to the whole baroque movie. Released in 1979.—*P.K.* (Sunshine Cinema; May 22-24.)

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

This noisy, undistinguished prequel to the "X-Men" series is mainly a fight film. The two warring mutant brothers, Liev Schreiber, a morose sadist with fangs, and Hugh Jackman, unhappy but ripped, fly at each other again and again, grappling, punching, slashing. Much of the combat is just a whirl of movement photographed up close. As the "X-Men" series has progressed, the startling and delicate poetic extravagances of the first film have given way to flesh-pounding brutishness; the men might be two angry Humvees at war. The story, devised by David Benioff and Skip Woods, is largely meaningless, and the emotions in the movie are no more than functional—they set up the next fight. With Danny Huston as the devious Colonel Stryker, who, claiming he can make Wolverine indestructible, dips him in a glass laboratory bathtub and injects a substance called adamantium into his veins. Naked, a buff Frankenstein's monster, Wolverine escapes, and Stryker tries to hunt him down. Various other mutants make brief appearances, to little effect. Directed by Gavin Hood.—*D.D.* (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

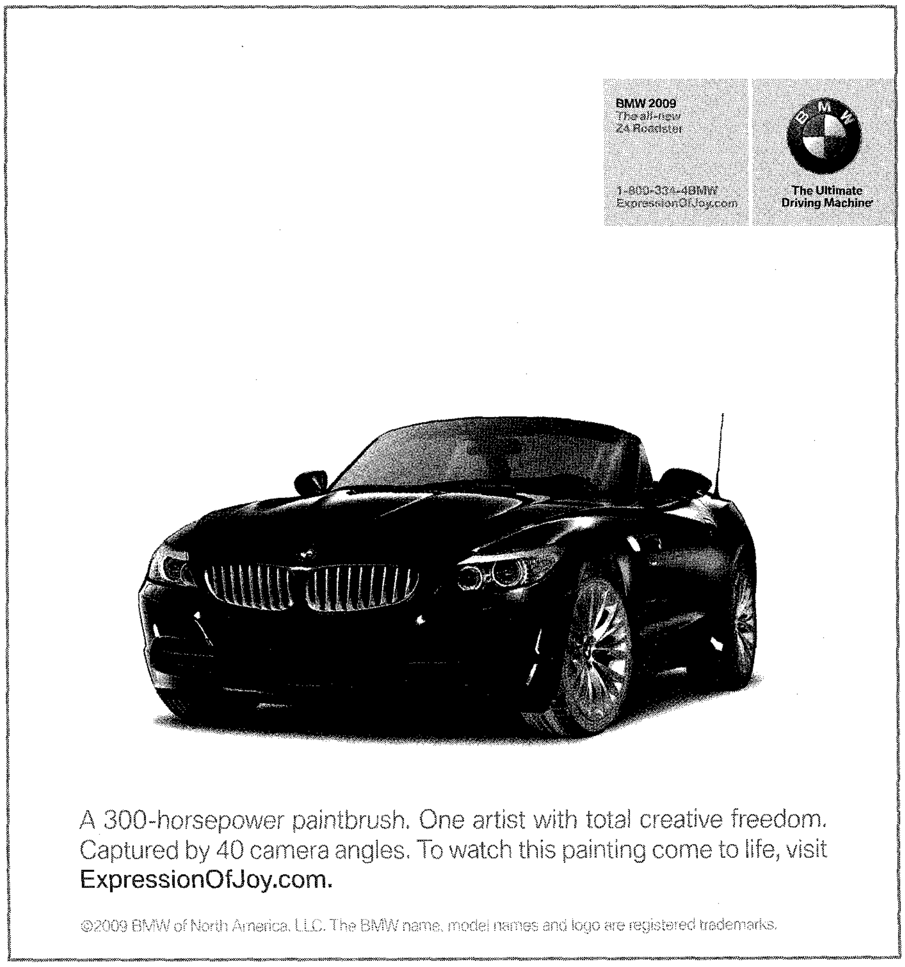
MONSTERS VS. ALIENS: In wide release. **OBSESSED:** In wide release. **17 AGAIN:** In wide release. **STATE OF PLAY:** In wide release. **VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Films by Ken Jacobs. May 20-21 at 6:45 and 9:15: "Anaglyph Tom" (2008). ♦ "Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema." All films are in Russian. May 21 at 7 and May 23 at 9:15: "Alexandra" (†). ♦ May 21 at 9:15 and May 23 at 7: "Cargo 200" (2007, Aleksei Balabanov). ♦ May 22 at 7 and May 24 at 4:15: "My Friend Ivan Lapshin" (1984, Aleksei German). ♦ May 23 at 4:15 and



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May 24 at 8:30: "Burnt by the Sun" (†). ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 23 at 5: Short silent films from the nineteen-twenties, including "Anemic Cinema" (1926, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray). ♦ May 24 at 4 and 5:15: Short films by Marie Menken.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"The Late Film." May 20 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Red Line 7000" (†). ♦ May 21 at 6:50 and 9:30: "El Dorado" (1966, Howard Hawks). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by the critics Andrew Sarris and Molly Haskell. ♦ "DanceAfrica Film," a selection of contemporary African cinema. May 22 at 2 and 6:50: "Heartlines" (2006, Angus Gibson; in Zulu, English, and Sotho). ♦ May 22 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Kinshasa Palace" (2006, Zeka Laplaine; in French, Khmer, English, and Portuguese). ♦ May 23 at 2 and 4:30: "Awaiting for Men" (2007, Katy Léna N'diaye; in Senegalese). ♦ May 23 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Shoot the Messenger" (2006, Ngozi Onwurah). ♦ May 24 at 6: "Munyurangabo" (2008, Lee Isaac Chung; in Kinyarwanda). ♦ May 25 at 2 and 4:30: "Azur and Asmar" (2006, Michel Ocelot; in Arabic and French). ♦ May 25 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Paris According to Moussa" (2003, Cheik Doukoré; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The Con Film Festival. May 20 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "The Defiant Ones" (1958, Stanley Kramer). ♦ May 20 at 2:55 and 7:10: "Cool Hand Luke" (1967, Stuart Rosenberg). ♦ May 21 at 1:30, 4:40, and 7:50: "Pick-Up" (1933, Marion Gering). ♦ May 21 at 3, 6:10, and 9:20: "You Only Live Once" (1937, Fritz Lang). ♦ The films of Tod Browning. May 25 at 5:40 and 8:20: "Fast Workers" (1933). ♦ May 25 at 7 and 9:40: "The Unknown" (1927). ♦ In revival. May 22-24 and May 26-28 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50 and May 25 at 1:10 and 3:20: "Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" (1964, Stanley Kubrick).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Steve McQueen. May 20 at 1 and May 23 at 3: "Nevada Smith" (1966, Henry Hathaway). The May 20 screening will be introduced by McQueen's son, Chad McQueen. ♦ May 20 at 3:30 and May 25 at 4:15: "The Cincinnati Kid" (1965, Norman Jewison). The May 20 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ May 20 at 7 and May 25 at 1: "The Sand Pebbles" (1966, Robert Wise). The May 20 screening will be introduced by Candice Bergen. ♦ May 21 and May 24 at 1: "The Towering Inferno" (1974, John Guillermin and Irwin Allen). ♦ May 21 at 4:15, May 23 at 8:40, and May 26 at 9: "Bullitt" (1968, Peter Yates). The May 26 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ May 21 at 6:30 and May 24 at 9:30: "The Thomas Crown Affair" (1968, Norman Jewison). The May 21 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ May 21 at 9:15 and May 22 at 6:30: "Love with the Proper Stranger" (1963, Robert Mulligan). The May 22 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with McQueen's first wife, Nellie McQueen Toffel. ♦ May 22 at 1:15 and May 23 at 5:45: "Papillon" (1973, Franklin J. Schaffner). ♦ May 22 and May 24 at 4:15: "An Enemy of the People" (1978, George Schaefer). ♦ May 22 at 8:45 and May 26 at 1: "The Getaway" (1972, Sam Peckinpah). The May 22 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the producer David Foster. ♦ May 23 at 12:30 and May 26 at 3:30: "The Magnificent Seven" (1960, John Sturges). The May 23 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the actor Robert Vaughn. ♦ May 24 at 6:20 and May 25 at 6:30: "The Great Escape" (†). ♦ "*Film Comment* Selects." May 26 at 6:30: "The Friends of Eddie Coyle" (†), followed by a discussion with the director, Peter Yates, and the editor of *Film Comment*, Gavin Smith.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"World Nomads Haiti." May 26 at 12:30 and 4: "Haïti Chérie" (2008, Claudio del Punta; in Creole and Spanish). The 4 P.M. screening will be followed by a discussion with the director Jonathan Demme. ♦ May 26 at 7: "Eat, for This Is My Body" (2008, Michelange Quay; in French) and "The Gospel of the Creole Pig" (2004, Quay; in French), followed by a Q. & A. with the director and Demme.

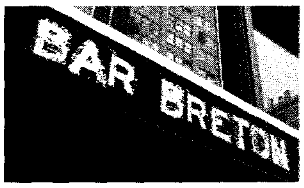
IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." May 22-24: "Eyes Wide Shut" (1999, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ "The Old Wave: Favorites from the French Masters." May 22-24 at 11 A.M.: "The Wages of Fear" (†). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. May 26 at 8: "The Glass House" (2009, Hamid Rahmanian; in Persian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention." May 20-21 at 1:30: "Horse" (1965, Andy Warhol). ♦ The films of Julien Duvivier. All films are in French, except where noted. May 20 at 4:30: "Anna Karenina" (1948; in English). ♦ May 20 at 8: "The Great Waltz" (1938). ♦ May 21 at 4:30 and May 23 at 1:30: "Heart of a Nation" (1940). ♦ May 21 at 8: "Under Paris Skies" (1950). ♦ May 22 at 4:30: "La Vie Miraculeuse de Thérèse Martin" (1929). ♦ May 22 at 8 and May 24 at 5: "Deadlier Than the Male" (1956). ♦ May 23 at 5: "Un Carnet de Bal" (1937). ♦ May 23 at 8: "Holiday for Henrietta" (1952). ♦ May 24 at 2 and May 25 at 7: "The Little World of Don Camillo" (1951; in Italian). ♦ The films of Kim Longinotto. May 20 at 7: "The Day I Will Never Forget" (2002). ♦ May 21 at 4: "Runaway" (2001). ♦ May 22 at 4: "Gaea Girls" (2000). ♦ May 22 at 7: "Shinjuku Boys" (2009) and "Dream Girls" (1993). ♦ May 23 at 4: "Eat the Kimono" (1989) and "The Good Wife of Tokyo" (1992).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 22 at 8: "8 ½" (1963, Federico Fellini; in Italian), introduced by Alexei Kaleina.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 22-24: "The Warriors" (†).

TABLES FOR TWO
BAR BRETON



254 Fifth Ave., at 28th St. (212-213-4999)—Good food can be found in perplexing places, and this casual French bistro, opened not long ago by the chef Cyril Renaud, sits in what must be Manhattan's last characterless quarter—an area that some maps sheepishly call Midtown South Central, a grungy zone between Koreatown and the Flatiron district that's quiet in a decaying, rather than leafy and cloistered, kind of way. Across the street from Bar Breton, there's a Quiznos, and, above, the refulgent Salon Santa Cruz. Inside, Renaud has constructed a cozy homage to his native Brittany, complete with faux fireplace, but, incongruously, a flat-screen TV hangs over the bar. The other night, a basketball game between the Celtics and the Bulls enhanced the feeling that this latest venture by Renaud, who has been nominated for a James Beard award and who for nearly a decade ran the Michelin-star-rated (and recently closed) Fleur de Sel, is akin to Michael Jordan suiting up for the Washington Wizards.

This is happy news for the diner. Although the service at Bar Breton can be erratic (and if you're unfortunate enough to be wedged into one of the booths up front, you'll yearn for a middle-of-the-row coach seat), Renaud's menu is packed with marvellous, intricately rendered things, popping with clever ingredients and fresh flavors. The wine list is substantial; there are two dozen bottles under thirty dollars, and most of the entrées, too, are amiably priced. The galette—a crêpe made with buckwheat flour—is king in Brittany, and Renaud offers an enticing panoply of them, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The saying may be "*Plat comme une galette*" (as flat as a galette), but Renaud stuffs his with the likes of lamb shank, smoked salmon, and Black Forest ham. One, with crab meat and Parmesan gratin, was compared to "a really delicious tuna melt"—an insult to the crab, perhaps, but a compliment to the chef. Some dishes disappoint: a pork chop was a tad dry; a salmon filet undercooked. The excellent appetizers and desserts, though, guarantee that the meal begins and ends exactly where you want it. Recently, a patron described the arugula-and-mushroom salad, dressed just right with lemon vinaigrette, as "summer in a bowl," while the gorgeous banana profiteroles took everybody's eyes off the TV. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $12-$28.)

—*Mike Peed*

READINGS AND TALKS

SELECTED SHORTS
Campbell Scott, Donna Murphy, and Mary Stuart Masterson bring the twenty-fifth anniversary season of the short-story reading series to a close with "Tales That Surprise," a program of twisted pieces by Amy Hempel, Shaun Tan, and Edna O'Brien. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 20 at 7.)

READINGS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR
The writer and television personality John Hodgman and the comedian Eugene Mirman read from their recent books. (P.S. 107, 1301 Eighth Ave., between 13th and 14th Sts., Brooklyn. For more information, visit www.ps107.org. May 20 at 7:30.)

POETRY PROJECT
Paul LaFarge and Jacqueline Waters read from their work. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door. May 20 at 8.)

THE POWERHOUSE ARENA
The wine columnist Mike Steinberger moderates a discussion between the writers David Kamp, David Lynch, and Benjamin Wallace about Wallace's book about Thomas Jefferson, some 1787 Château Lafite Bordeaux, and the oil-and-gas magnate Bill Koch, "The Billionaire's Vinegar: The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine." (37 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-666-3049. May 21 at 7.)

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
"Speaker Series: The Minds That Move the World" comes to a close with this event, in which Charlie Rose interviews James Carville and Karl Rove. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 866-858-0800. May 26 at 8.)

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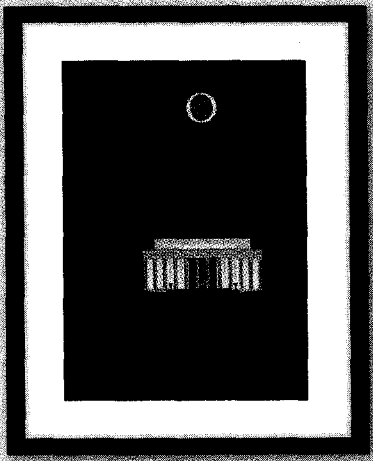

Bob Staake, 2008

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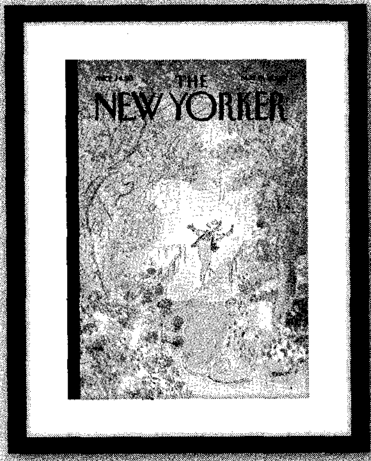
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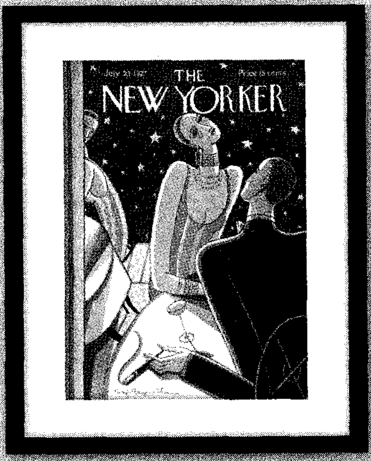
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ABOVE AND BEYOND

HOT TIMES

Summer arrives this weekend (socially, at least), and the city has responded with a few seasonally appropriate events. From May 19 to May 26, the Waterfront Museum (a 1914 Lehigh Valley railroad barge that's usually found in Red Hook) and the Pegasus, a 1907 tugboat that typically berths in Jersey City, will be docked at the Hudson River Park, off of 44th St. The two vessels are en route to Albany to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the explorer Henry Hudson's arrival in the New World. There will be free tours of the tug and barge from May 23-25, and the barge is hosting a staged reading of Budd Schulberg's classic tale "On the Waterfront" on May 22 at 8. (For more information, visit www.waterfrontmuseum.org.) ♦ For the first time since 2006, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, which had been out of service for renovations, puts on a series of events for Fleet Week, which runs May 20-26. (www.intrepidmuseum.org.) ♦ Over on the East River, the Water Taxi Beach, a friendly bit of seasonal magic featuring nine hundred tons of white sand, picnic tables, and a bar adjacent to the New York Water Taxi's Long Island City ferry stop, officially opens for the season on May 23, with a celebration featuring the powerhouse d.j. Louie Vega. Later this season, the ferry company is opening similar spots on Governors Island and at the South Street Seaport; beachgoers can get a sneak preview of the Seaport's eighteen thousand square feet of sand on the 23rd, at an event featuring the legendary Studio 54 d.j. Nicky Siano, who will be in residency there on Saturday nights through the summer. (www.watertaxibeach.com.)

WORLD RECORD APPRECIATION SOCIETY

The Universal Record Database, a Web site that is to the Guinness World Records as Wikipedia is to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, bills itself as the "definitive site for human achievement." This means there's finally a place, at least online, for people who aspire to achieve such distinctions as "Longest Suspension of Tape Measure While Standing on One Foot" and "Slowest Consumption of a Bowl of Cereal." (The records, by the way, are a hundred and forty-four inches and twenty minutes and 24.09 seconds, respectively.) Once a month, the site (which is open to all) gives such people a chance at greater recognition, during a party in which records are set before a live audience. On May 20, starting at 8, attempts will be made to knit the longest scarf in two hours, to deliver the most knock-knock jokes in one minute, and to perform the fastest recital of the first paragraph of Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita" while doing a backbend. (Crash Mansion, 199 Bowery, at Spring St. For more information, visit www.urdb.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

American art takes center stage this week, with works by Georgia O'Keeffe, George Bellows, and Milton Avery, among others, going under the gavel. Fascination with the West is a significant theme at **Christie's** (May 20), where the top lot is a romanticized scene by Bierstadt ("Oregon Trail"), redolent with dreams of manifest destiny. The grandeur of the Rockies is the subject of more than one work in the sale, including Ernest Leonard Blumenschein's mystical post-Impressionist composition "Untitled (Wood Gatherers)." Silver and objects of virtu will be auctioned two days later (May 22), in a sale that offers several lots of ornamental snuffboxes, some decorated with mosaics, others with mother-of-pearl, and still others with enamel and precious stones. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ On May 20, **Sotheby's** holds a sale of American Indian art: enigmatic and frightening polychrome masks, pipes of many shapes (including one in the shape of a war club), finely woven baskets, and vibrant Navajo blankets are some of the items included. Then, on May 21, the house offers a sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture, mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where sentimental, Impressionist views (such as Childe Hassam's "Newport") share the podium with opulent ladies (like John Singer Sargent's "Mrs. George Mosenthal") and Western vistas (such as Charles Marion Russell's "Buffalo Hunting"). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Fans of graphic design will have much to choose from at **Swann's** auction of modernist posters on May 21; it's especially strong in the Art Deco department, featuring such items as two posters from the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, the event that gave the artistic movement its name. A lovely group of images designed by the illustrator Katherine Milhous under the auspices of the WPA promote the charms of Pennsylvania Dutch country, with ruddy-faced beauties clad in heavy cloaks and bonnets surrounded by a surfeit of rustic delights. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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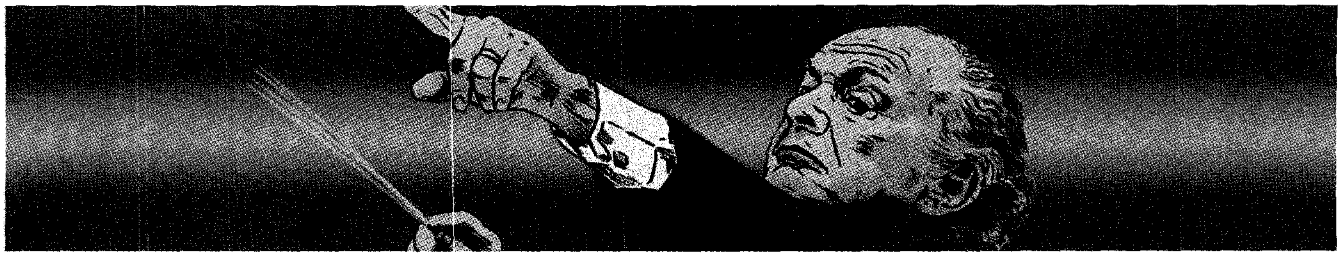

RUTH GWILY

Lorin Maazel leaves the New York Philharmonic.

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
EGYPTIAN MODERN

May 29-June 7

Youssef Chahine, who died in 2008, was the leading filmmaker of modern Egypt; he daringly asserted Egypt's place in the modern world. BAM offers a weeklong retrospective of his work, including his "Alexandria Trilogy." (718-636-4100.)

ART
TOGETHER AGAIN

June 2-Aug. 23

Henry Clay Frick had a soft spot for the work of James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). This summer, the Frick Collection will install four full-length portraits and a seascape by the American painter, alongside fifteen works on paper inspired by his sojourn to Venice in 1879; it is the first time in twenty years that the works have been exhibited en masse. (212-288-0700.)

THE THEATRE
STARRY NIGHT

June 10

The Public kicks off the Shakespeare in the Park season with "Twelfth Night." The cast includes Anne Hathaway, Audra McDonald, Raúl Esparza, Michael Cumpsty, and Jay O. Sanders. Daniel Sullivan directs. (For more information, visit www.publictheater.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
AS THOUSANDS CHEER

June 24-27

In his seven-year tenure as music director of the New York Philharmonic, Lorin Maazel may never have become a true citizen of the city, but he led dozens of superb concerts. His departure will be a grand affair; he will conduct four performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 (the so-called "Symphony of a Thousand," with its massed choirs and extra brass). (212-875-5656.)

NIGHT LIFE
DOWN BY THE SEA

July 18

Coney Island may have lost Astroland, but it still has the Cyclone roller coaster and the free Siren Music Festival; this year's acts include Built to Spill, the Raveonettes, Frightened Rabbit, Grand Duchy, Monotonix, and Micachu & the Shapes. (www.villagevoice.com/siren.)

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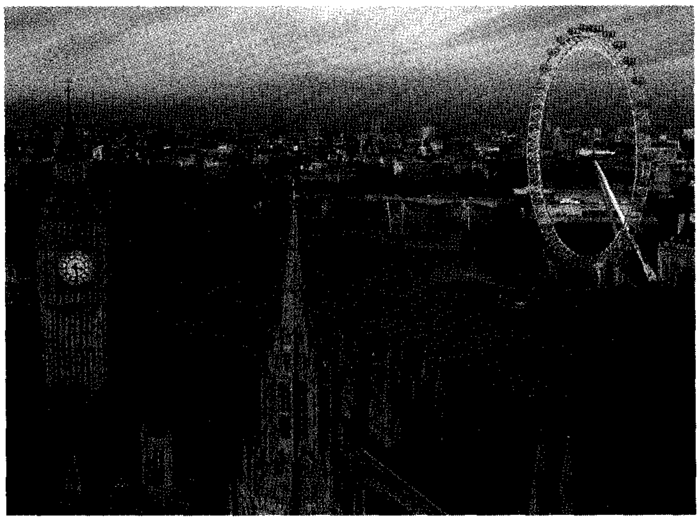
This year marks several significant anniversaries, including 500 years since Henry VIII was crowned, 250 years since Kew Gardens opened, 150 years since Big Ben's first tick, and 100 years of shopping at Selfridges. While the city celebrates, you can live it up with standout global cuisine and local favorites. From market stalls to gastropubs and an astounding 46 Michelin starred restaurants, London is a prime foodie destination.



Clockwise, from left: St. Paul's Cathedral, the London Eye, gourmet dining, shopping on Carnaby Street, a delightful local bakery, a traditional pint.

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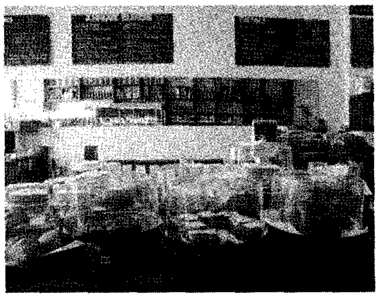

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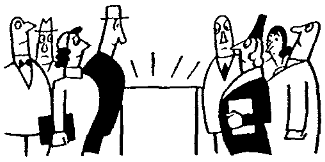
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
IN SEARCH OF SUCCESS

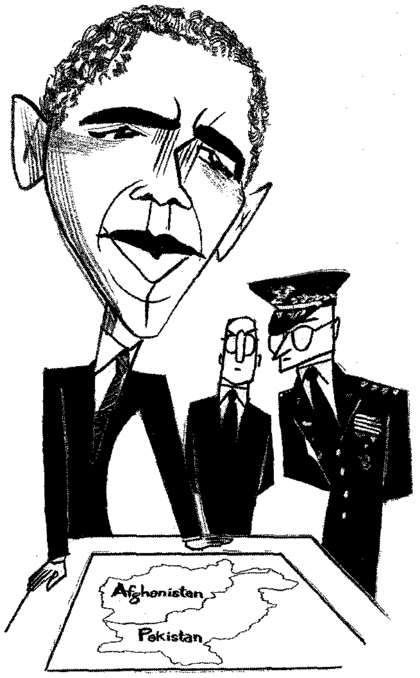


In 2007, a Guantánamo military commission reviewed prisoner No. 008, also known as Abdullah Gulam Rasoul, a designated enemy combatant who had been held without legal rights for about six years. Rasoul told his captors that he had "never been America's enemy and I never intend to be." Guantánamo's quasi-jurists transferred him to Afghanistan's government, which set him free. This spring, under the name Mullah Abdullah Zakir, he has resurfaced as one of the most vicious and effective Taliban commanders in Afghanistan's southern Helmand Province, where thousands of recently deployed U.S. troops are now arriving to join the battle.

As a parable of the United States and its enemies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Rasoul's case has a familiar, circular quality. See in its particulars what you will: the deficiencies of the Bush Administration's detention system; incompetent intelligence collecting; an Afghan government without a plausible justice system. The long-lived trend is of greater consequence. Exactly three decades ago, in the spring of 1979, an uprising against Afghanistan's then-Soviet-backed regime drew the Carter Administration into discussions about how to assist the region's Islamist rebels. Ever since, the United States has been struggling to grasp the patterns of cause and effect in its own policymaking.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

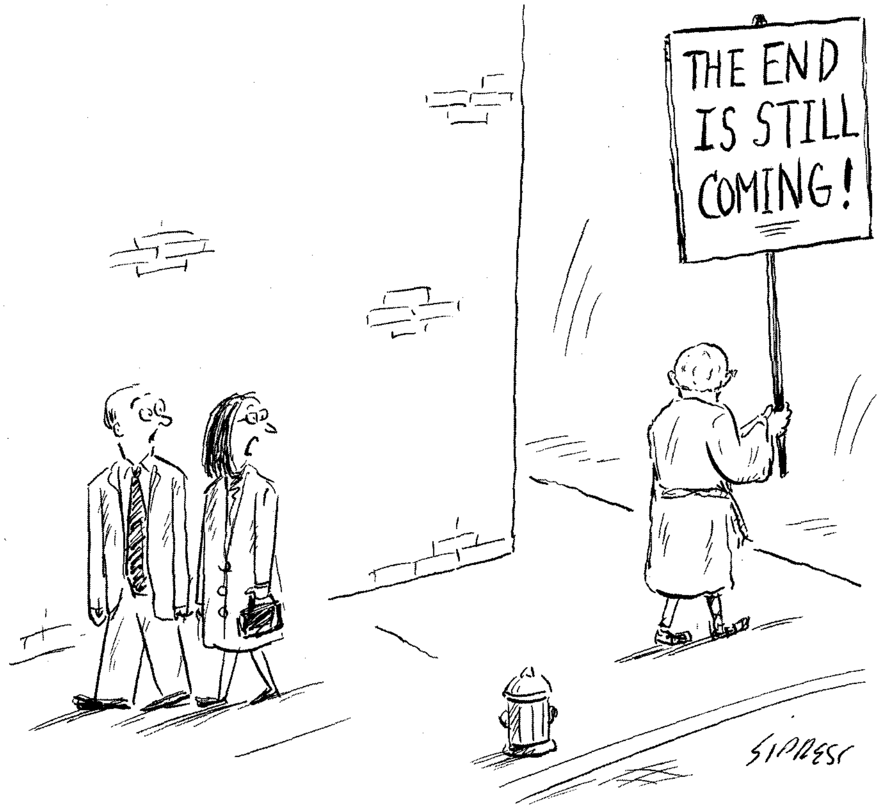
The miscalculations across five Administrations are by now generally understood: near-unequivocal support for anti-American militias during the nineteen-eighties; averted eyes as Pakistan pursued its covert nuclear ambitions; the abandonment of Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal; the failure to recognize the menace of Al Qaeda during the nineteen-nineties; erratic investments in Pakistan's democracy, economy, and civil society; and, most recently, a war in Afghanistan after 9/11 which did not defeat Al Qaeda or the Taliban but chased them into Pakistan, where they regrouped and have proceeded to destabilize a country now endowed with atomic bombs.



For several months, the Obama Administration has been rethinking American policy, hoping to depart from this history of dysfunction. It has announced a formal strategy: an adaptive counterinsurgency doctrine that seeks to emphasize the security and the prosperity of the Afghan and Pakistani people above all; economic and development aid; vigorous diplomacy; and carefully targeted warfare, particularly aimed at Al Qaeda. Already, however, Obama and his advisers have had to confront the puzzle of which policies in their new portfolio will promote stability in the region, and which will promote instability.

Just a few weeks ago, the Taliban advanced so close to Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, that it seemed the Pakistan Army might have lost its will to fight. The Obama Administration urged the Army into battle. Fortunately, given the stakes, the Army acted, and it has evidently fought with gusto in recent days, but to such an extent that it has now churned up a million internal refugees, who constitute yet another pool of displaced and disaffected civilians that the Taliban will surely attempt to exploit.

"A key aspect to the new strategy is to put more attention and resources toward Pakistan's economic and governance challenges," Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special envoy to the region, told Congress last week. Yet Pakistan's prideful insistence on its sovereignty means, among other things, that the


THE END IS STILL COMING!
SIPRESS

"Wasn't that Paul Krugman?"

• •

United States cannot provide relief directly to internally displaced civilians. Their fate will now depend on Pakistan's fragile and unpopular government, with support from charities and the United Nations; the Obama Administration must stand in the rear, urgently working its bellows.

Obama's strategy seeks to alter the daily experiences and thus the political outlooks of Afghan and Pakistani civilians. Yet to an overwhelming extent the American presence in the region is located in its Afghan military deployments. The President's advisers grasp this dilemma, too, but they have not yet solved it. It has been plain for some time, for example, that the tactical advantage that the United States enjoys in Afghanistan because of its superior air power may be more than offset by the deepening resentments that aerial attacks produce in the minds of helpless civilians below. Four years ago, polls showed that eighty-three per cent of Afghans held a favorable view of the United States; today, only half do, and the trajectory is downward. Persistent civilian casualties caused by air strikes in rural Afghanistan are a major cause of this deterioration. American commanders say that they understand the problem, and the rate of such incidents has declined, but mistakes continue; dozens of Afghan civilians died earlier this month during a United States-led bombing raid in Farah Province.

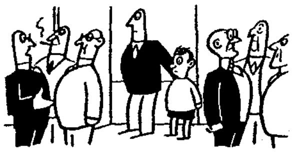
In Pakistan's tribal regions, near the Afghan border, the United States deploys the armed flying robots known as Predator drones in attacks against Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders. About a year ago, the United States began to acquire better intelligence regarding these terrorist groups. The recent accuracy of the attacks has caused Al Qaeda to murder suspected spies in self-defeating fits of paranoia, a trend that has disrupted the organization's ability to plan attacks against the U.S. and its allies. General David Petraeus, the over-all American military commander in the region, told CNN, "Al Qaeda, in particular, has sustained some very serious losses over the course of the last six to ten months or so, and there is a considerable concern among those leaders because of the losses that they have sustained."

It would be difficult for any President to set aside military analysis of this tenor; in any event, Obama has persisted with the Predator strikes at roughly the same rate as George W. Bush. There is no evidence, however, that the drone campaign has yet moved closer to Al Qaeda's senior leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, or dismantled the group decisively; instead, the targeting still seems to be stuck in the middle of Al Qaeda's leadership lists. Moreover, Pakistan's government, although it apparently facilitates the drone attacks in private, finds it necessary to vocally oppose them in public, knowing how unpopular they are. Opportunism and hypocrisy hardly seem the foundation for a sustainable political-military partnership that breaks with the unhappy past.

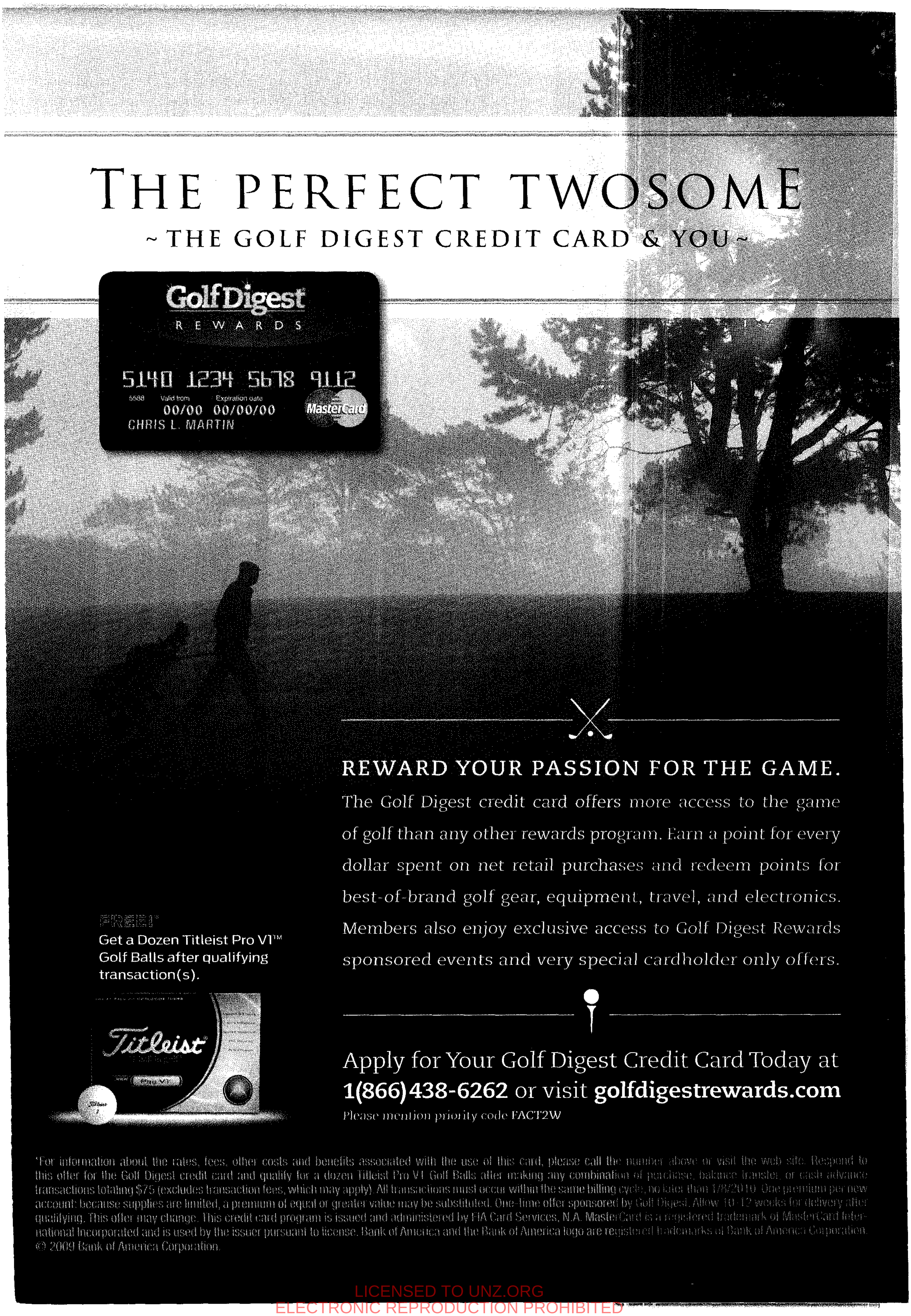
There are some ideas in train that may truly be transformative. Last week, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, a bipartisan plan to provide Pakistan with $1.5 billion in annual nonmilitary aid, for at least five years. The legislation is intended to "mend a broken relationship with the Pakistani people," as John Kerry, who co-sponsored the bill with Richard Lugar, put it. The bill has been well designed to support, for the first time in years, the long-term goal of rebalancing U.S. aid to strengthen pluralism and democracy in Pakistan. "Most Pakistanis feel that America has used and abandoned their country in the past," Kerry noted. Indeed, most Afghans feel the same. Obama has inherited a toxic legacy; Congress, at least, could ease his burden.

—*Steve Coll*

SPROUTS
DODGE CITY



Dodge Landesman, Democratic candidate for City Council in the Second District, got his start in public speaking on the VH1 reality show "Ice-T's Rap School," as an eighth grader at York Prep, on the Upper West Side.



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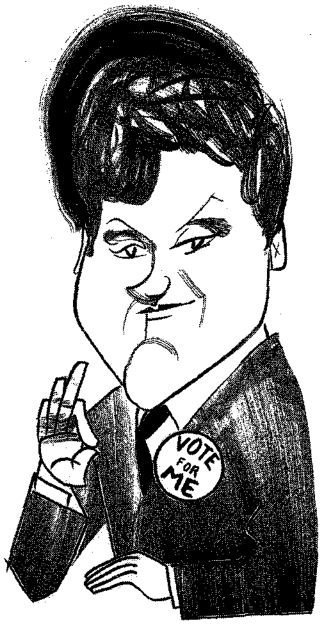
"We had to open for Public Enemy, and it was the most daunting experience of my life," he said the other day, sitting in his living room on East Twenty-second Street, before a barbecue fund-raiser, on the roof. "There were all these angry, drunk, stoned people there, and I remember thinking to myself before I went onstage, If I can handle this, I can handle anything. I had to freestyle. Right now I may freestyle a speech, but at least I don't have to rhyme the speech or keep on the beat, which back then was tough for me."

Landesman, or Dodge City, as he was known on the show, is now in eleventh grade, and, if elected, he will be, at nineteen, the youngest City Council member in history. He has red hair and a baby face, but he is in some ways an old soul. Behind him on the wall was a poster of Dwight Eisenhower, his favorite President. "Way back in 'Rap School,' that was a huge dominating force of mine," he said, referring to the nineteen-fifties. "It died down a little bit as I grew older, but it's still an era that I reflect upon. To me, it's an era of peace and progress, and that's a big part of my campaign." Landesman was dressed in a khaki suit and wore a narrow blue necktie. He had a nick on his chin, from shaving. As he spoke, he accentuated his points with his thumb and index finger pressed together, like a natural politician, and frequently paused to compliment his guest for asking a good question. This, it emerged, was not his first campaign; last year, as a sophomore, he ran for student-council president on a platform of vending machines and dress-down days, and lost. "I was running against an eleventh grader, a pretty popular eleventh grader," he said. "You know, Richard Nixon—not that Richard Nixon's my political idol, but he did lose his first class election, and I think he was in tenth grade as well, so I always point to that. I say, 'No big deal.' "

The donors were about to arrive. Up on the roof, Landesman, noticing a smudge on his brown-and-white saddle shoes, licked his fingers and bent over to apply a manual shine. Rocco Landesman, Dodge's dad and the owner of Jujamcyn Theatres, talked with a Tony Awards voter while Jonathan Reynolds, a former *Times Magazine* food columnist and Dodge's stepdad, grilled hamburgers. The Landesman family connections—soon to be extended, with Rocco's recent nomination to chair the National Endowment for the Arts—have helped Dodge score a donation from the restaurateur Danny Meyer and an appearance by Julianne Moore at a fund-raising event. But matching-fund rules require that he receive donations from at least seventy-five voters in his district (Kips Bay, Gramercy, Lower East Side), and so Dodge had recently embarked on his first handshake tour, knocking on all the doors in his apartment building and inviting neighbors to the barbecue.



Dodge Landesman

Soon it was freestyle time. After a brief introduction by Brent O'Leary, candidate for the Twenty-sixth District, in Queens, Landesman played to his natural strengths, portraying himself as an education candidate, advocating greater school choice and increased parental involvement. "It's about bringing fresh, progressive new ideas to the table," he said. "It's about getting young people involved." A group of teens from York Prep looked on proudly. When asked about the budget crunch, Landesman didn't flinch. "I would say, why don't, for now, we temporarily put a hold on building the Second Avenue subway?" he said.

Lloyd Cole, from apartment 13-M, stood with Sandra Ribicic, from 8-P, and Gil Horowitz, a member of seven Democratic clubs in lower Manhattan, who is serving as a joint campaign-and-college adviser. Horowitz pointed out that he is exactly four times Landesman's age. "Can I use the expression 'Who roped him into this?' " Cole asked.

"He's a self-starter," Horowitz said. "He's been following local politics as a hobby since he was a youngster."

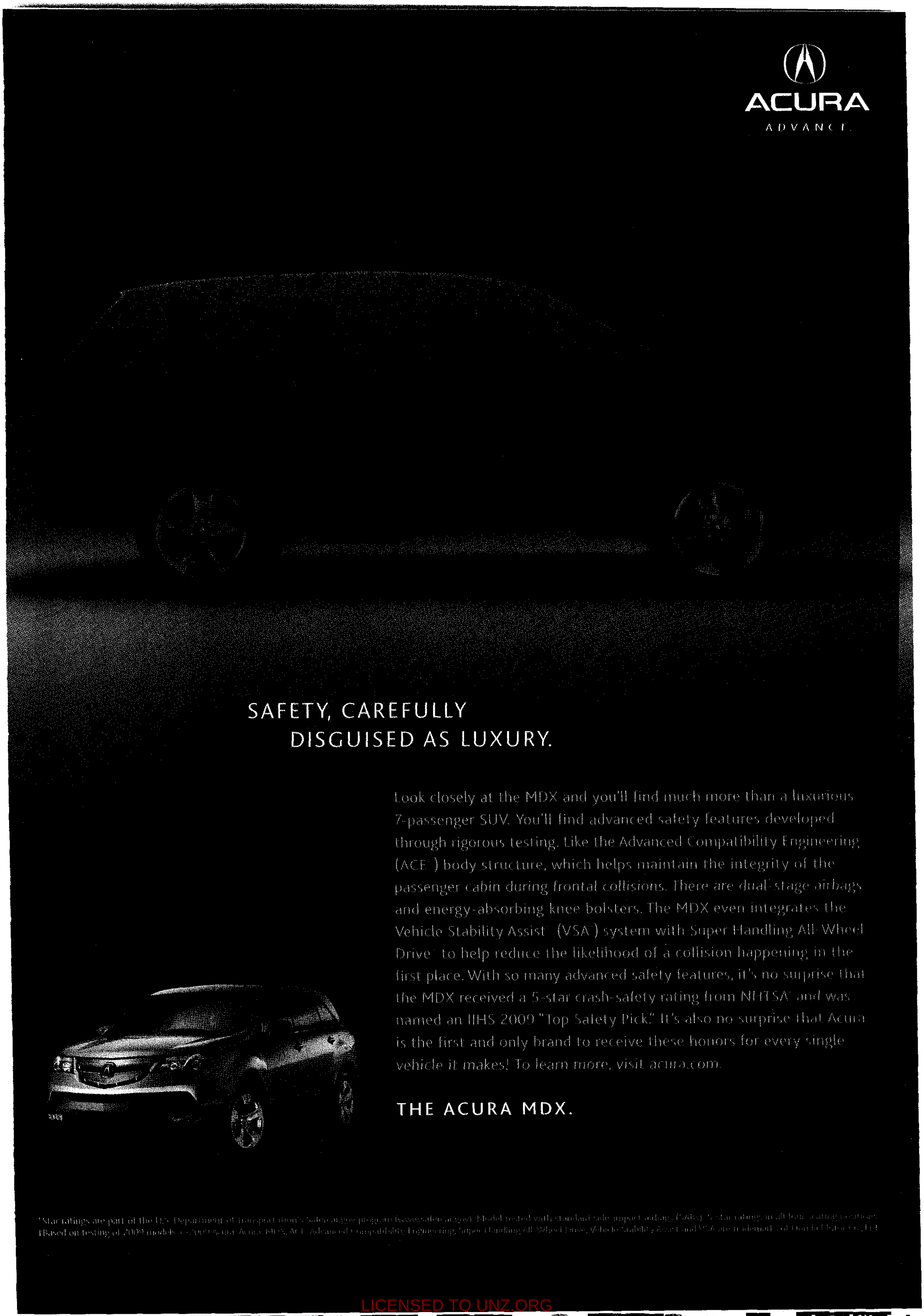
"He's impressive and he's funny," Ribicic said. "He should go into P.R." Ribicic was especially grateful for the roof access, which afforded a view of Gramercy Park.

The York Prep contingent, meanwhile, complained about the cost of this year's prom ($135), which was to be held the following night. (Landesman skipped it, citing various meetings: "Unfortunately, I've had to sacrifice a very significant chunk of my social calendar, if you will.") None of them were old enough to vote, but they had a healthy respect for the corruption inherent in the political process. Landesman's best friend, known to VH1 viewers as Money Man Sam, is running for student-council president this year. ("His campaign's not quite as important as Dodge's campaign," another friend said.) "My opponent has resorted to bribing little children with sweets and doughnuts," Sam said. "I said, 'You know what, I'm going to take the high road. I'm going to treat these kids like adults.' "

—*Ben McGrath*

DEPT. OF TRANSIENTS
FISH OUT OF WATER

A couple of Fridays ago, when the weather was warm and office workers all over the city were streaming up the avenues at lunchtime, a group of Alaskans gathered at Alaska House, on Mercer Street, for a buffet lunch celebrating a program called Alaska Benefisheries. The program works like this: Every spring, salmon across the Pacific are seized with an urge to swim



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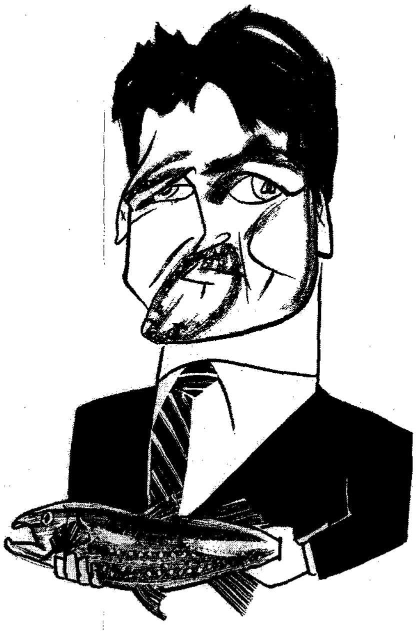
to Alaska, to spawn in the tributaries of the rivers where they were born. But, before they get there, most are caught by fishermen and sold to restaurants all over the world. What's not sold is canned and shipped to countries that have food shortages—Bolivia, Laos, Cambodia, among others. Often, the people in these countries have never encountered wild salmon, and the lunch menu at Alaska House consisted of recipes that the recipient countries had improvised: salmon salad with green papaya and peanuts (Jamaica), curried-salmon samosas (India), salmon-and-corn fritters (Guinea-Bissau), and salmon ceviche (Guatemala). The bagels and lox were local.

Governor Sarah Palin was supposed to be the guest of honor, but she had been called home to deal with a flood in the Yukon River valley, and so her husband, Todd, was the biggest fish in the room. Todd Palin has a set-net operation in Bristol Bay—he fishes close to the beach—and an informal poll of attendees suggested that he is respected in the industry. "Nushagak Bay," Kevin Adams, a board member of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, said, referring to the location of Palin's nets. "That's a very nice net site. There's lots of sites, but he happens to have one of the more competitive ones." Palin was wearing a black suit, a yellow shirt, and a red tie that looked a few inches too short. He seemed relaxed, having just escorted his daughter Bristol through a gruelling round of talk-show interviews. (Matt Lauer: "Do you think there is also room in this entire discussion for the concept of practicing safe sex?") "I've enjoyed it," he said, of his time in the city. "We walked down to Central Park, and we walked around Times Square." He said that he was looking forward to the start of salmon season, next month, but he cautioned that his day job is not as exciting as it looks on the TV show "The Deadliest Catch": "Anytime you tell someone you're a commercial fisherman, they automatically think you're one of those tough guys on the deck out there."



Todd Palin

Adams broke in. "Don't let Todd kid you," he said. "I fish in the same fishery. It's in the same general area where 'The Deadliest Catch' goes on."

Palin smiled. "We're out there twenty-four hours a day in an open aluminum skiff," he said. "And sometimes there's fish to keep you busy, to stay warm, and sometimes there's no fish." He brings family members along to crew with him. "It's tough to maintain a crew when your daughter says, 'O.K., Dad, we're out here for eighteen hours—all night. I froze, we got a hundred pounds of fish, and I made five bucks.' " He added, "That's just the name of the game in fishing sometimes."

"It's like being a fireman," Adams said. "Sometimes you're putting out fires, sometimes you wait for them to happen."

Palin was introduced to Cliff Feldman, the program director for an international aid group, who said that he was about to ship a batch of Alaskan herring to Uganda.

Palin seemed pleased. "Uganda," he said. "We've got a lot of herring that needs to be harvested." He went on, "So what's the salmon roe looking like now? How are sales going?"

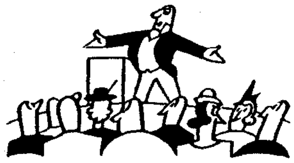
"Things are moving along just fine," Adams said.

Feldman joked, "We don't have the poor eating caviar yet, but we're working on it!"

It was time for lunch. Palin gave a speech in which he apologized for his wife's absence ("She is a huge fan of Alaska seafood; she loves to talk about our fisheries") and praised the nutritional value of salmon ("rich in vitamins and minerals and a source of omega-3 fats"). Then he left to catch a plane to Washington, where he would attend the White House Correspondents' Dinner. After he was gone, the seafood talk went on for a bit. "I love New York," Lesil McGuire, an Alaska state senator, said. "We're trying to get in school lunch programs in the inner city. We say, 'Why are kids eating tater tots? Why aren't they eating salmon?' " Bruce Schactler, who does a type of fishing called purse seining, said that he was visiting New York for the first time: "It's just like in the movies." He had been shopping at Saks, but (unlike Governor Palin) he'd been put off by the price tags (two hundred and fifty dollars for a shirt). Lyman Hoffman, another state senator and a Kuskokwim River king-salmon fisherman, had gone to the Statue of Liberty, but he'd ended up staying on the boat, because he found the crowds annoying. He looked out at Mercer Street and observed the people outside—"everyone rushing around." He said they looked like salmon. He thought for a second and added, "I don't know where they're going. I think the salmon have a purpose."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

SCHOOL DAYS
HUG IT OUT



The shtick of successful, confident people insisting that they were losers back in high school can be unconvincing, but the talent agent Ari Emanuel—a winner, if not a born one, who, after the merger of Endeavor and William Morris, will become co-C.E.O. of the second-largest shop in Hollywood—had it pretty tough. Ezekiel, his oldest brother (now a special adviser for health policy at the Office of Management and Budget), was the brain. Rahm, the middle sibling (chief of staff to President Obama), was the charmer. The Emanuel boys were required to post their report cards on the refrigerator. Ari's grades were invariably the lowest. Because he is dyslexic,

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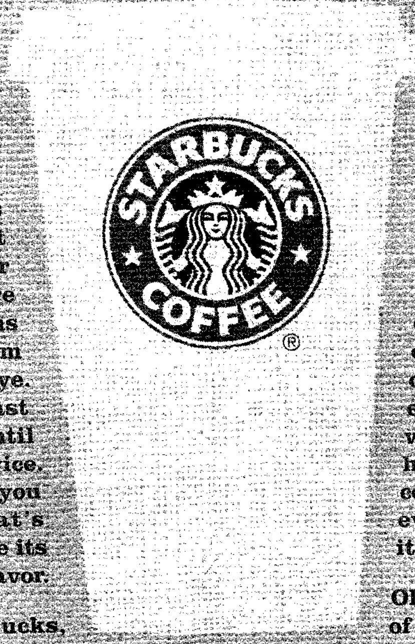

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he had trouble with words. And, because he has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, he had trouble concentrating on the words he was having trouble with. In sports ("I was an unbelievable wrestler") and subjects besides English ("I was spectacular at math"), he kept up with his peers, but his high school placed him in a special-education program. "Jesus Christ. It was brutal," Emanuel recalled recently. "You put on a really hard face at school and you beat the crap out of people and then you come home and start crying. And you have all these dark voices in your head that we all know: 'Maybe I should kill myself.' 'Am I ever going to make it?' 'Am I ever going to be successful?' "

Emanuel, who was the inspiration for the role that Jeremy Piven plays on the HBO show "Entourage," and who shares the character's vein-popping mojo, if not his aversion to self-examination, was speaking at the Friends Seminary on behalf of the N.Y.U. Child Study Center, which presents an annual lecture to raise awareness about learning disorders. A few minutes earlier, sitting at the front of the hall, he had fiddled with a lapel mike and abruptly launched into his presentation. Mothers were still getting out their notebooks. The child psychiatrist Harold Koplewicz, the center's director, who was moderating the discussion, suggested that they start over. "This is A.D.H.D.," Emanuel said. "I just started. If you weren't ready, I was."

Koplewicz began again, and gave the intro that he had prepared. Emanuel was "the definition of a world-class talent agent," representing Martin Scorsese, Larry David, and Sacha Baron Cohen. "He's married to Sarah Addington—"

"Sarah *Emanuel!*" Emanuel interjected. "I negotiated that." He continued, "You know, my wife called me when I came here, and she goes, 'No four-letter words,' and I said, 'There goes my interview.' "

"I'm going to work with you," Koplewicz said.

They began with Emanuel's first recollection of school: arriving, as a third grader, in Wilmette, Illinois, after spending the summer with his family in Israel. "Truly, the first day, I went to the principal's office, because I beat the crap out of some kid who was making fun of me," Emanuel said. The kid had called Emanuel a name, he said. "Because I tan easily. I was very dark."

"So something was wrong," Koplewicz said. "Was it something with your behavior, or did you think something was wrong with the way you were learning?"

Emanuel summoned a memory of being kept after class by an unfamiliar adult, who presented him with a pair of flash cards. "He said, 'What are these?' " he recalled. "I knew they were a banana and a mule, but to get 'banana, mule' out—I couldn't do it."

After that: "horse pills of Ritalin," stomach aches, frustration, embarrassment. Fighting came up frequently ("I wanted to kill that kid, I really almost did, slamming his head into that wooden grate"), as did Emanuel's mother, who ended up teaching him to read, he said, through sheer force of will. At one point, Koplewicz asked about Emanuel's relationships with his brothers and whether they suffered from the same problems he does.

"Zeke says he did. Yeah, I want *that* A.D.H.D.!" Emanuel said. "Rahm, I don't know—he used to skip around going, 'I hate school, I hate school!' "

Emanuel admitted that his problems occasionally caused tension with his brothers, especially Zeke. "Who wanted to be around *him*? He's the fuckin' genius, and I'm losing it." Rahm, he said, had always been his best friend. "Before the current situation, we would talk four, five times a day," he said. "Now we just talk on Saturdays."

Emanuel made it to college. Then he made it to New York, where he got a job at a talent agency, and then to L.A., where, eventually, he persuaded his future wife, an East Coast girl whom he knew from Illinois, to join him. "I called her every day for a year," Emanuel said. "I tell people I signed my wife."

Persistence, Emanuel believes, is a positive consequence of his learning disorders. "What happens when you're dyslexic is you gain all these other tools," he said. Canniness, for example. Emanuel has three sons. Recently, his wife asked him to help one of them with his grammar homework. "I said, 'Here's how Daddy got by,' " Emanuel recalled telling his son, as they tried to make sense of possessives. " 'What I'd do, I'd put the apostrophe *over* the "s." ' " He paused. "I don't know what form of intelligence that is, but that's something."

—Lauren Collins

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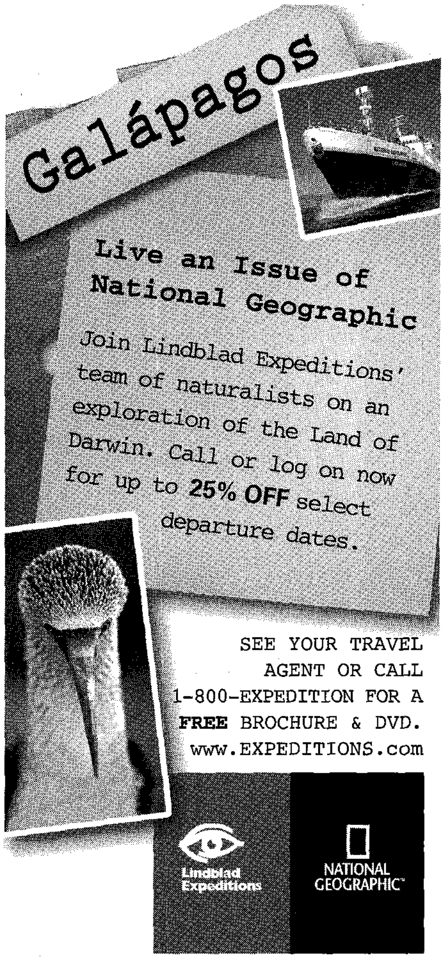
The rest of you? Beat it.

—George Meyer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ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

FACE VALUE

Against the odds, the watch business keeps on ticking.

BY PATRICIA MARX

Once upon a time, before there *was* time, the market for wristwatches was sluggish. Today, almost fourteen billion years later, in a universe dense with cell phones, iPods, microwave ovens, and other objects displaying the current hour, minute, and second, the need for personal instruments dedicated solely to timekeeping is similarly close to nil. Accordingly, sales of luxury wristwatches fell by thirty per cent in the past year, and I don't think I know anyone under thirty who admits to habitually strapping on a watch.

And then there's Baselworld! Held over eight spring days for the past thirty-seven years in the stolid town of Basel, in northwestern Switzerland, Baselworld is the largest watch trade show in the cosmos. Here's what I mean by largest: six multistory buildings spanning 1,722,000 square feet, including about thirty-six miles of corridors, in which one can get very lost; 1,952 exhibitors from forty-five countries; thirty thousand workers; 93,900 visitors, some of whom let you know that they had to bunk in boats on the Rhine because there are only so many hotel rooms and you took one of them. Also: twenty-eight restaurants and bars; seven infirmaries; a private police force; a judiciary to settle trademark disputes; three thousand journalists; and enough business cards to terrify the nearby Black Forest.

There are watches, too. Based on a rough reckoning by the show's director, Sylvie Ritter, about two hundred thousand ticking timepieces are on view. And so, despite the grim sales numbers, a visitor to Baselworld could easily be convinced that people all over the world share James Joyce's fabled predilection for wearing several watches at once, each set to a different hour.

To be accurate, Baselworld is not just a watch extravaganza. There's jewelry, too. But the jewelry just sits around, showing off. Wristwatches have to work for their living. The can-do Timex Expedition WS4 is equipped to indicate the temperature, the barometric pressure, the altitude, and which way is true north, and its face is the shape of the rear window of a Land Rover ($199). The blingy Swarovski D:light bangle blinks the time on its crystal screen as if it were a DVD player in need of your attention ($1,500 in stainless steel, $1,700 in gold). The husky Rolex Oyster Perpetual Sea-Dweller Deep Sea is gauged to survive thirteen thousand feet underwater, which is more than one could ever have said about Jacques Cousteau ($9,250). The Movado Series 800 chronometer has a Kevlar strap, but be careful—the rest of the watch is defenseless ($1,295). The gold case of Jacob & Co's Manhattan encloses 3-D replicas of New York buildings, none of which are yet in foreclosure, although Jacob is currently serving time in prison for lying to federal agents ($90,000-$120,000). Dior's Christal Tourbillon Rubies, strewn with big red gems and hundreds of invisibly set diamonds, comes in a limited edition of one—though, at $1.3 million, will that really be a problem? There have been talking watches; watches with fragrance-emitting bands; anti-malaria watches; analog watches with no hands; watches powered by air; binary LED-display watches that are so hard to read it is the next day before you decode what time it was; watches that act as TV remotes, Bluetooth devices, computer flash drives, and telephones; watches that detect WiFi signals, predict the weather, monitor your sleep patterns, lock and unlock your Aston Martin coupe ($37,900), and play Tchaikovsky on a built-in drum set and keyboards ($600,000-$625,000). And then there is my favorite: the pig-shaped Wake n' Bacon alarm clock, which awakens you with the smell of a sizzling slice of bacon (though you'll need another alarm clock to remind you to load it with a frozen slice the night before; still in prototype).

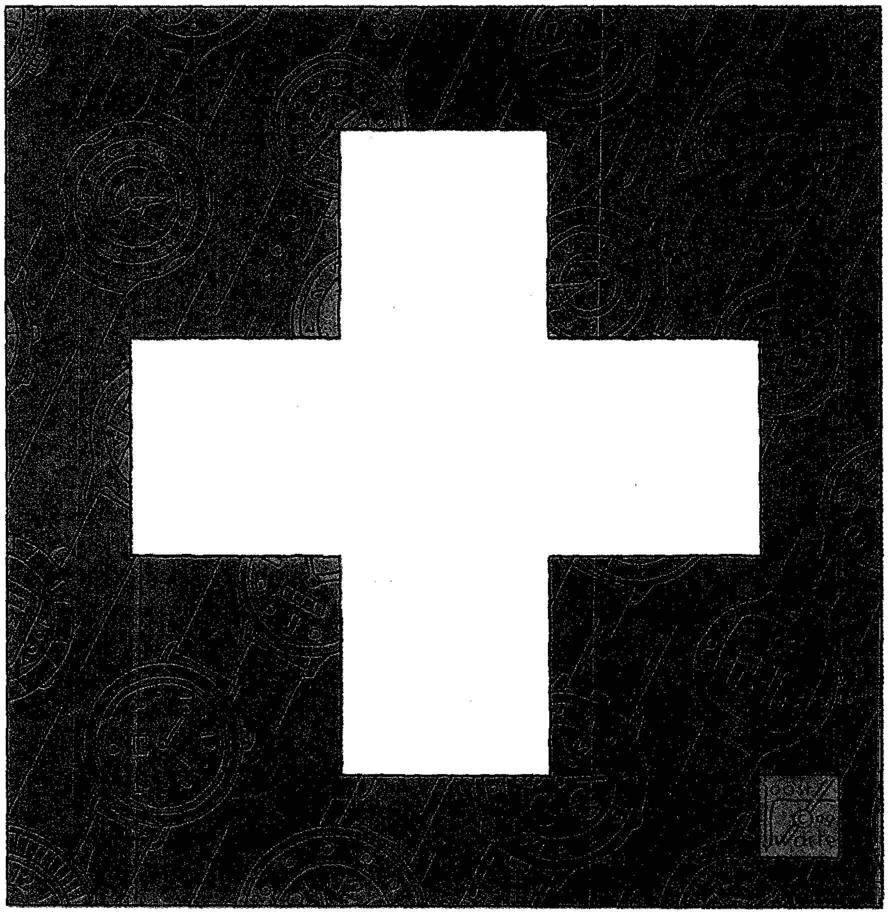
"It's like a cocktail party in here!" Julie Senseman whooped across the aisle of American Airlines Flight 64 to Switzerland. "The stewardesses can't believe how much drinking there is!" Senseman, the vice-president of a company that distributes watches and jewelry to duty-free shops, told me she knew sixty or so of the revellers on board. "What Baselworld is this for you?" she asked, a question I heard often in the next few days, from people who'd come as many as thirty years in a row. (They called me a "Basel virgin.") "It's my sixteenth," one told me, "but I skipped a year to have the triplets."

There is a reason that guidebooks for Switzerland describe Basel as conveniently situated near exciting places like France and Germany. Don't blame the quietude on Albert Hoffman, a chemist who, while working in a Basel lab, became the first person to synthesize LSD. "I think there are still traces of it in the water here," one public-relations manager told me. That would be wishful thinking.

At Baselworld, or Teutonic Spring Break, as I came to think of it, doors open daily at 9 A.M., and if you have to ask what time it is you're in the wrong country. In 2006, Switzerland was the No. 1 exporter of watches in terms of value ($11 billion), though in terms of units the champion was China. That year, the average export price of a Swiss watch was four hundred and ten dollars, compared with one dollar for a Chinese watch, which—coincidence?—looks an awful lot like a Swiss watch.

Let's start in the Hall of Dreams, and, if our reveries remain unfulfilled, we can proceed upstairs to the Hall of Desires. But what if we have a vision in the Hall of Sensations or a sensation in the Hall of Visions? Don't worry. The names are arbitrary. Ritter, the Baselworld director, explained, "In 2002, the jewelry exhibitors said, 'We're in Building Two? But that doesn't correspond to who we really are.' So I said, 'O.K., how about we call it the Hall of Feelings?' And they said, 'Oh, yes!' And then the watch people said, 'But what about us?' So I said, 'How about the Hall of Dreams?' "

On to the booths, then, although to call them that is an insult to architecture. They are Swiss cathedrals. Erected in only a few weeks, these two-, three-, and four-story indoor edifices are disassembled each year and stored in local warehouses until the next Baselworld. "That's the best high-def TV I've ever seen!" a passerby said, looking at the thirty-one-foot-long-by-eleven-foot-tall aquarium that dominated the Breitling pavilion. (Ten black-tip reef sharks that lived inside have since been sent to a laboratory to become guinea pigs in a study about how to increase human longevity.) TAG Heuer's cuspidate aluminum mountain looked like a blowup of a crystal molecule, whereas de Grisogono's stand, made up of a thousand iridescent diodes, suggested the carapace of a tinselly tortoise. Rolex and Patek Philippe opted for cubical fortresses made of stark white stone and glass. Marc Eckō turned its spot into a swank men's club, detailed with a poker table and rhino décor. Inexplicably, Bertolucci created a structure that looked like an enormous wood-slatted barrel. The stupendous light show at the Dolce & Gabbana cabana would have been spectacular enough, but the mirrored floor and ceiling gave it an extra, migrainogenic oomph. To enter the stand-alone Bulgari building, or should I say billionaire's bomb shelter, built from burnished marble, wood, and polycarbonate, you descended some stairs, then some more stairs, then even more stairs, until you got to a Richard Serra-ish torqued passageway, which led to . . .

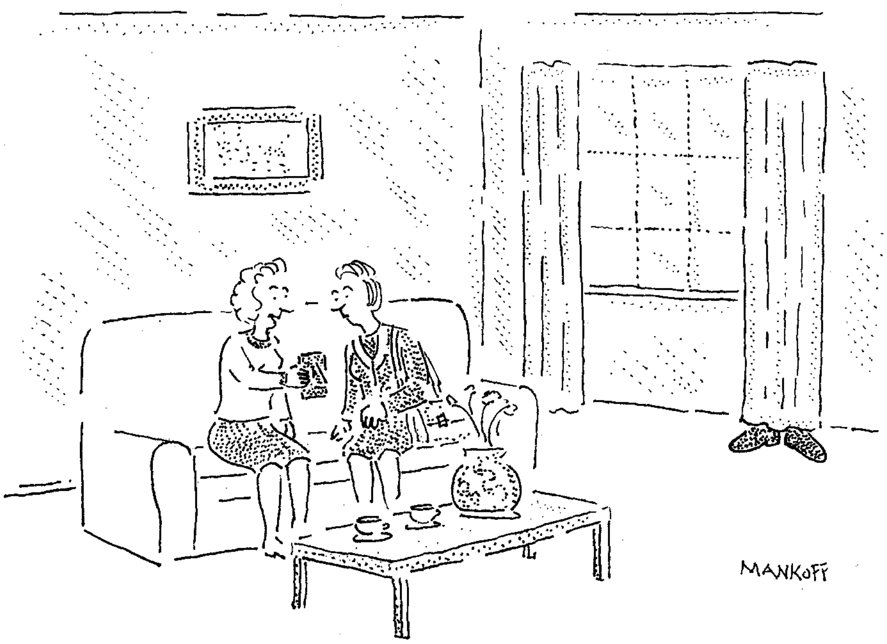


The most prestigious watches are so prestigious that nobody knows they exist.

JOOST SWARTE

I'm sorry, but these mini-malls are not open to the public. You'd have had to make an appointment if you wanted to step inside, and it would have facilitated matters if you were a retailer or a wholesaler or a member of the press. Oh, how lucky! I have a press pass, so come with me up one of the spiral staircases, which, by the way, are as run-of-the-mill here as rose-gold bezels and white watch faces (chocolate-colored was last year). A chic woman in a black sleeveless shift, black stockings, and black pumps will introduce us to this year's collection, and maybe the *président directeur général* of the company will pop his head in.

"Time is free. Why should you pay for it?" Jean-Claude Biver, the C.E.O. of Hublot, asked me. He is a strapping fellow with a bald head and a smile, like an



"Then one day he vanished without a trace."

affable bouncer who lets everyone in. We were upstairs, having drinks in a darkly lit space that looked like a business-class lounge. "Don't buy a watch to make money," Biver said. "Its value could go down. What never goes down is emotion, love, dreaming. Dreams are going up. You must buy culture, trust." At the time, this made perfect sense to me. "This," he said, pointing to his watch, a black ceramic apparatus the size of a plum and called the Big Bang King Power, "this is eternity. And, when you buy eternity, you are as close to God as you can get" ($32,000). Come again?

If someone says that his watch has complications, this doesn't mean it's in therapy. A complication refers to any function on a watch other than basic timekeeping. This includes indicating the lunar phase, the air temperature, and the hour angle of the vernal equinox, as well as chiming out the minute on demand and resetting itself until kingdom come or the year 2400, whichever arrives first. The Patek Philippe Calibre 89 pocket watch, which is purported to be the world's most complicated model, cannot do my laundry, but its 1,728 parts and twenty-four hands enable it to perform thirty-three tasks, among them figuring out the date of Easter in, say, 2172, and displaying a chart of the night sky with twenty-eight hundred stars. The most recent price for the Calibre 89 was four million dollars, paid at auction in 2004.

The most prestigious watches are so prestigious that nobody knows they exist—except, of course, the couple of aesthetes who are recherché enough and riche enough to have procured one. Rolex, on the other hand, may not be the fanciest timepiece, but it is probably the label that most non-watch nuts believe is the fanciest. It is the largest luxury wristwatch brand, producing some six hundred thousand tickers per year. You can't go wrong with a Rolex, many at Baselworld assured me, even competing venders. "First quiz of the day," Doug Meine, Rolex's U.S. executive vice-president, said to a group of us sitting opposite him in his gigantic office at the company's gargantuan booth. "Can anyone tell me what the dial on this watch is made of? Meteorite? Right answer! You get a prize!"—a box of chocolates. (If only I'd studied.) "Next quiz. This one's about J.F.K. Who gave him a watch? Yes, Marilyn. She gave him a gold Rolex Day-Date for his birthday. It had an inscription: 'Jack, with love as always from Marilyn May 29 1962.' " He continued, "J.F.K. supposedly gave it to an aide to keep secret. Vintage Rolex watches. They tell such a great story, and they maintain, if not increase, in value." As it happened, I'd brought along the red-dialled Rolex I bought a few years ago on eBay for three hundred dollars. With a touch of pride, I handed my nest egg to Meine, who examined the mechanism under a loupe. "Hybrid," he said, after a few seconds. My watch was a mutt made up of various parts from other watches. Here's the last quiz question: Can I interest you in a, um, Rolex?

"Seriously, guys, this watch is going to kick ass in retail," Rachel Branch, TAG Heuer's senior director of public relations and education, said one afternoon in her company's Star Trekkish booth. Branch, a young woman with more energy than mc^2, was presenting the new collection, and the bargain to which she was referring was the Aquaracer 500, a sporty and highly readable gadget meant for scuba divers, though of course watches are never really meant for whom they're meant for. "It's only twenty-four hundred and fifty," Branch said, noting that competitors would sell a comparable watch for more than three times as much, even without the exhibition back. An exhibition back, also called a skeleton movement, is a transparent aperture on the back or the front of a case, through which you can see the inner workings of the watch and then constantly worry that one of those little jigglers is not jiggling quite right. And, incidentally, it is true that Rolex prefers to keep the private parts of its engines covered up.

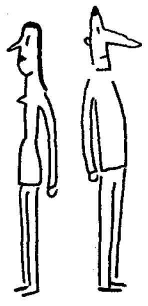
Georg Jensen is known for its silversmithing, but the company's watches are not to be ignored—particularly a slinky, open-ended metal bangle called the Vivianna, which was created in 1969 by the company's noted designer Vivianna Torun Bülow-Hübe. The watch has a mirrored face, so that you will always have something lovely to look at. And don't bother checking the hour, because there's only a second hand. The designer has said that she created the model "to free people from the slavery of time." For those who are as yet unemancipated, versions with hour and minute hands are also available ($4,300 with a diamond bezel, $11,800 for 18k. gold, $28,500 with pavé diamonds).

This year, cleaner, less fussy dials are in, and "Wow, I'm a rocket-ship captain!" dials are out. Or so say the merchants of Basel, who also say that men's watch faces shall remain gigantic and women's models will get bigger, too. Also popular this year: rubber straps, red dial hands, retrogrades (linear rather than circular time readouts), tourbillions (rotating devices inside watches that supposedly counter the effects of gravity), steel, diamonds for men ("and I don't mean just men in Miami and New Jersey," according to one publicist).

The big news at Breitling is that, as of this year, with the début of the Chronomat B01, the company will be manufacturing in-house "movements," which is ticktock-ese for the innards of a watch. Some other watchmakers have this capability—Chopard, Vacheron Constantin, Patek Philippe, Zenith, Bulgari, to name a few—but the majority of brands purchase movement blanks from outside suppliers, which they then customize. The largest of these sources is a company called ETA, owned by the Swatch Group. ETA controls between seventy-five per cent and ninety per cent of the worldwide market. This means that most watches are basically the same inside. Kind of human, isn't it? Several years ago, however, ETA announced that after 2010 it will no longer sell *ébauches* (i.e., unassembled movements) to non-Swatch Group brands. Hence the impending pressure on watch companies to produce parts or perish. Business plan, anyone? I'm talking to you, China.

The earliest watches—imprecise things, with only an hour hand—were considered jewelry and were worn as pendants or brooches. Portable clocks, they came in hefty brass cases; you can spot them dangling from the ruffs of noblemen in European paintings from as early as the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the mathematician Blaise Pascal tied a tiny clock to his wrist with string, supposedly becoming the first man to wear a wristwatch. Blaise aside, these so-called "wristlets" were deemed exclusively for ladies. Gentlemen carried pocket watches—that is, once they had waistcoat pockets, which arrived in 1666, when, by royal proclamation, Charles II introduced the waistcoat to his subjects. (Around the same time, the word "punctual" entered common parlance, perhaps because most clocks and watches were finally being rigged with not just an hour hand but also a minute hand.) It took a war for men to feel brave enough to be caught dead in a wristlet. In the heat of battle, you just don't feel like fumbling around inside your pocket to find out when the artillery's coming. British troops wore strap watches during the Boer War to coördinate flanking operations, and in the First World War the rugged trench watch, with its metal grid over the crystal, was cherished by soldiers. In 1917, as an homage to the tank commanders who helped defend France, Louis Cartier designed the rectangular tank watch, which was inspired by the vehicle's shape and rugged elegance (women's white-gold American Tank with diamonds, $33,875). But when was it, I wonder, that so many people developed the annoying habit of setting their watches a few minutes ahead and then arriving late anyway?

Time out for a lesson: "How Clocks and Watches Work." For the most part, they operate by tallying the number of times that something—such as a pendulum, a balance wheel, a tuning fork, or a vibrating crystal—oscillates when it is pushed or energized to do so by, say, a spring, a weight, or an electric force. After this something swings back and forth a certain number of cycles—one or two, in the case of pendulums; five to ten, for balance wheels; and 32,768, for a quartz crystal—the clock declares that one second has elapsed. The accuracy of a timekeeper depends on how uniformly the oscillating device goes to and fro. Regarding watches, price and accuracy do not necessarily correlate. The eight-dollar quartz number you picked up on Canal Street will probably gain or lose about ten seconds a month, whereas the mechanical marvel you picked up at Baselworld for a few hundred thousand dollars will have drifted several minutes. But that's practically a sundial compared to an atomic clock. The beast used by the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology, in Colorado, to help determine official time—the oscillating element is cesium—is off at most one second every hundred million years.



Have you ever noticed that watches in advertisements are usually set to ten-ten? Don't believe the people who claim that this has something to do with the time of the assassination of Lincoln or Kennedy. Mitch Janoff, a trustee of the American Clock & Watch Museum, in Bristol, Connecticut, told me, "This configuration is ideal for framing the manufacturer's logo, and, moreover, it makes the clock face look happy."

If you're in the business of counting and keeping track of moments, then anniversaries probably mean a lot to you. Victorinox Swiss Army is marking its hundred-and-twenty-fifth birthday with the release of a red-and-gold Infantry Vintage chronograph that is etched with a seal reading "125 years, your companion for life" (Egad!) ($1,200). And Omega threw a rollicking cocktail party starring Buzz Aldrin and other astronauts, to kvell over the fortieth birthday of the first lunar landing—of both man and wristwatch. ("Omega was picked by the government because our watch tested best. It wasn't like 'We want moon placement' or anything," Theresa Kuiken, the company's marketing director, explained.) The commemorative memento that I coveted most was TAG's big blue-dialled Monaco Fortieth Anniversary, which looks like an automobile dashboard and is a slightly updated model of the chronograph that Steve McQueen wore in the movie "Le Mans" ($7,900). ("You'll get more mojo from this than any other watch," Rachel Branch said.)

Party time! Among the countless blowouts at Baselword, Breitling's is considered to be the most lavish. A few years back, guests were taken in buses to a quarry that had been transformed into a mythical Persian landscape, appointed with sandpits and palm trees. Camels and white stallions roamed the premises, as did chickens. Guests were given flowing robes and head scarves to wear, and sat on cushions, where they were entertained by belly dancers while being served a Middle Eastern banquet and forbidden hooch. Hookahs were passed around. "Just when you thought it was over," Roberta Naas, a watch-industry writer, told me, "one of the walls disappeared, revealing Siberian tigers and tiger tamers in cages." After the animal act, the cages vanished in a puff of smoke, and, lo, another wall lifted and the pseudo oasis turned into a pseudo disco. Another year, at what the Breitling people call their "terrorist party," the buses were pulled over at an abandoned warehouse by men in full military garb with machine guns, who subjected the passengers to interrogations. Afterward, there was dinner and dancing. The mise en scène this year, my sources say, involved models, Afghan hounds, fireworks, burlesque dancers, and a man in a bondage mask.

If a company doesn't have an anniversary to celebrate, it can always drum up a tribute keepsake. Oris's rectangular Bob Dylan watch has the singer's face engraved on the case back and comes in a box with a harmonica ($2,150). Get one now, because the company made only three thousand. Most of the watches released this year, by the way, seem to be "limited editions." Could this be code for "Gee, who can afford a new watch in this economy?"?

The LGI Network, a data-gathering organization that is of the people, by the people, and for the people in the business of luxury, reports that although watch sales over all are down, those at the low end (under a thousand dollars) are doing the least badly. The watch industry has been in distress before. Are there lessons to learn? For instance, how did Timex, which was originally a Connecticut-based company called Waterbury Clock, weather the Great Depression? As Jenny Mclaughlin, a Timex marketing executive, explained, "Mickey Mouse saved our ass." Through the nineteen-thirties, the company churned out millions of Mickey watches. (They originally retailed at $1.50 and are now collector's items, one fetching $6,160 in a 2005 auction, although you can pick up a new one for about $20 on amazon.com.)

Some watch pros could recall the Digital Quartz Crisis of the nineteen-seventies—when the Japanese began to mass-produce watches driven by electronic quartz oscillators—which stopped Swiss horologists like a sprung spring. Until then, Switzerland had had a lock on the watch market. Today, ninety per cent of all watches contain quartz movements juiced by batteries. Between 1970 and 1984, employment in the Swiss watch industry fell by two-thirds, from ninety thousand to thirty thousand, but the Swiss had only themselves to blame. In 1967, a secret research group in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, created Beta 21, the first prototype of a quartz watch. But for some reason they scrapped their plan to merchandise it. Two years later, in Japan, scientists at Seiko, also working sub rosa, unveiled their own quartz watch. Their 18k. Astron 35SQ crystal-controlled contraption was approximately the same price as a Toyota Corolla. In 1983, the pendulum swung back to Switzerland, when Nicholas Hayek introduced the economical and sassily designed analog quartz watch the Swatch. "Nick Hayek added cachet to Swiss watches," Dan Kisch, the publisher of a magazine for jewelry-store operators, told me. "The Swiss used to be in the business of timekeeping. Now they are in the timepiece business." Watches today, the people at Baselworld will tell you, fulfill many roles that have nothing to do with time: they are status symbols, bequests, investments, *bijoux pour les hommes*, toys for geeks. "They're never a grudge purchase," Timex's Mclaughlin said. "People might say, 'Damn it, I have to buy cat food or toilet paper,' but they don't say that about a watch. Watches are talismanic."

Now might be the time to mention, if you didn't already hear it from Immanuel Kant, that there is no such thing as time—at least, universal, absolute time. Rather, the interval between now and then depends on space, gravity, and motion. You cannot, therefore, answer the question "When?" without also considering "Where?" and "How fast?" (See the theory of special relativity, by Albert Einstein, whose uncomplicated 1931 Longines wristwatch sold at auction last year for $596,000. Incidentally, Einstein purportedly once said, "The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once," proving that everybody, even the *Time* Man of the Century, longs to be included in Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations.")

Oh, dear. It turns out that memories may be a thing of the future if, as some physicists believe, time runs backward (backward wristwatch, houseofrave.com, $28.95). More bad news: time may be running out of time. Other physicists speculate that our universe could mutate from space-time to just plain space. Time itself would cease to exist. Even your platinum Sotirio Bulgari with a perpetual calendar will be no good then ($212,000). But here's some promising news. According to the lead story each morning in the *Baselworld Daily News*, [*name of C.E.O.*] feels confident that [*name of watch company*], an iconic brand that has always stood for [*pick two: heritage/value/luxury/innovation*], is ideally placed to go through these [*euphemism for really sucky circumstances*] and come out ticking. ♦

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BY ANN HODGMAN

Discussion points for members who have not read this month's book:

1. Studying the cover of this month's selection may provide hints to the reasons that Margy MacDougal chose this book for your group. What does the metallic font used for the title convey—pretension, or insecurity? Although the cover art is minimal, what tensions does it suggest are lurking under the superficially glossy surface of Margy's relationship with her husband, Eric?

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

2. In your opinion, is this book fiction or nonfiction? Support your view with examples taken from the jacket copy.

3. Last year, Margy was in Costa Rica when the group discussed the book she had chosen. Why did she get to pick two books this season? Why were both of them so grim? Is there a subtext related to Margy's daughter's deferral from Colgate? Could next month's book maybe be more cheerful, for once?

4. Book-club members who have actually read this book have called its plot "depressing," "disgusting," and "too much about poor people." Does this suggest that you, as a reader, have a moral obligation to say that you liked the book?

5. Early in the prologue, we learn that lab animals will be mistreated as the story progresses. In literature, why is it so much sadder when an animal dies than when a person does? Why does God choose us to read horrible things like this?

6. Open the book to page 47 and slide a bookmark under it. How well can you see the Borders logo through the page? Can the quality of a book's paper be used as a guide to its "worth"? When or when not?

7. On page 2, the author refers to "supper." In books, food is often used as a symbol. Try to think of a time when food, or a particular meal, has been important to you. Then keep it to yourself.

8. A book's setting is crucial to establishing mood. If this book had been set in Darfur instead of in Glen Burnie, would you be more likely to have read the whole thing by now? Why or why not?

9. Is there a way that, by quickly flipping through the pages as if in search of a particular passage, you might be able to glean more of the plot in case Margy calls on you? Why not turn to the last page?

10. What is in those little sandwiches on the piano? Are peanut allergies real?

11. Will the powder room have one of those wick-diffuser things in a bottle, or a scented candle? If such items were described in the book, would they be presented as symbols of vulgarity?

12. What do you think will happen next? ♦

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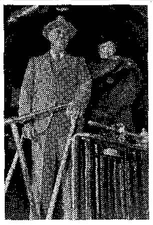

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THE SPORTING SCENE

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

The college lacrosse tryouts that aren't.

BY JOHN McPHEE

College Park, in early summer, and high-school rising seniors from all over the United States have been playing lacrosse all day. And all yesterday. On a pair of fields below the Comcast Center, on the vast campus of the University of Maryland. The two fields are parallel and generously fenced—parents not permitted inside the fence. Along the back-to-back sidelines in the blazing sun—in the narrow strip that separates the fields—middle-aged men sit on their personal Renetto Canopy Chairs, or, more commonly, on folding chairs under large golf umbrellas. As they trudge in daily, they resemble caddies, thick elongate bags hanging from their shoulders. Inside the bags are the chairs. The designer chairs are one-piece erections, bag as canopy, canopy as bag. Who else could these people be that they are so prepared? They are college lacrosse coaches. Outnumbering the players playing on the fields beside them, they are from Lehigh, Lynchburg, Trinity, Denver, Virginia, Michigan, Maryland, Moravian, Massachusetts, Princeton, Penn State, Pennsylvania, Providence, North Carolina, Ohio State, Towson, Pace, Washington and Lee, Grand Canyon, Army, Navy, Merchant Marine, Air Force, Eastern Connecticut, Stevens, Siena, Syracuse, Loyola, Lafayette, R.P.I., Randolph-Macon, Bucknell, Cornell, Brown, Dartmouth, Birmingham-Southern, Holy Cross, Colgate, Georgetown, Gettysburg, Rollins, Salisbury, Haverford, Harvard, Hofstra, Hampden-Sydney, Queens, Cabrini, Hobart, Johns Hopkins, Franklin & Marshall, Yale, Christopher Newport, et cetera. They can swivel in their chairs to watch one game or the other, in sunshine or rain. They carry clipboards, rosters on the clipboards, and mainly they are writing cryptic notes, but bits of conversation now and again float down the midway.

COACH 1: Why did you turn around?

COACH 2: I just wanted to watch Walker Clinton.

COACH 1: Is he good?

COACH 2: No.

Walker Clinton is an invented name, in order to protect the kid who is no good.

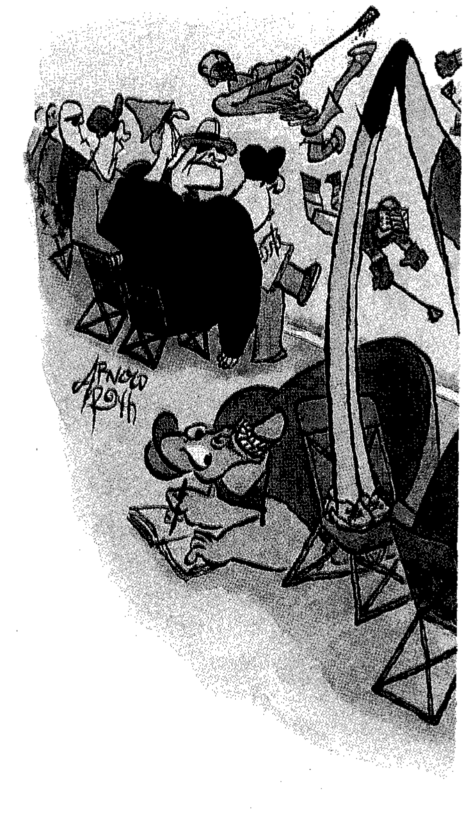
COACH 3 to COACH 4: Have you considered Name Withheld?

COACH 4: He has a ninety-seven average but I can't take him. I haven't got room.

COACH 5 to COACH 6: I can't see what he sees in him.

COACH 6: Do not disagree with the man. He hasn't got an opinion unless he's right.

COACH 7 to COACH 8: He has



Each year, promising high-school lacrosse playe pretty good skills, but he needs serious work in the weight room.

COACH 8: He can't play.

COACH 9: He's probably not going to get it done for us.

COACH 10: I don't think he can play for us, either.

COACH 11: He needs some work stickwise. He's pretty athletic, though. He's tough as shit.

This is like being in a barn at a quarter-horse auction.

Princeton, Towson, and Maryland do not need umbrellas. Princeton, Towson, and Maryland are in a polyethylene pavilion. Their coaches run this camp. When it began, in 1989, it was called Top 205, because two hundred and five high-school players is the number it hoped to attract. It has two overlapping sessions now—each three nights, four days—that draw some eight hundred and eighty high-school players, who are all here on their coaches' recommendations. By N.C.A.A. rule, there can be no "tryout camp," so 205 sends recommendation forms to every high-school lacrosse coach in the country, and the camp must accept, on a first-come first-served basis, anyone who applies. The players want to come because they know who is going to be watching. The guys that resemble caddies are—altogether—about two hundred in number. Princeton's Bill Tierney describes the camp as "one-stop shopping for coaches."

The cryptograms they write to themselves on their roster sheets seem to look upon punctuation as a delay of game.

thick goes hard good skills does too much
clunky
big, athletic, black, rough skills
weak skills, hides
slow good position afraid to engage
no skills, runs away
slow overaggressive dumb
unselfish
selfish solid skills
flashy stick quick burst
good skills too cool?
looks better than he is
looks awkward, gets job done
looks ugly, gets job done
solid athlete, very vanilla
bad athlete
avg athlete lost on field
not horrible

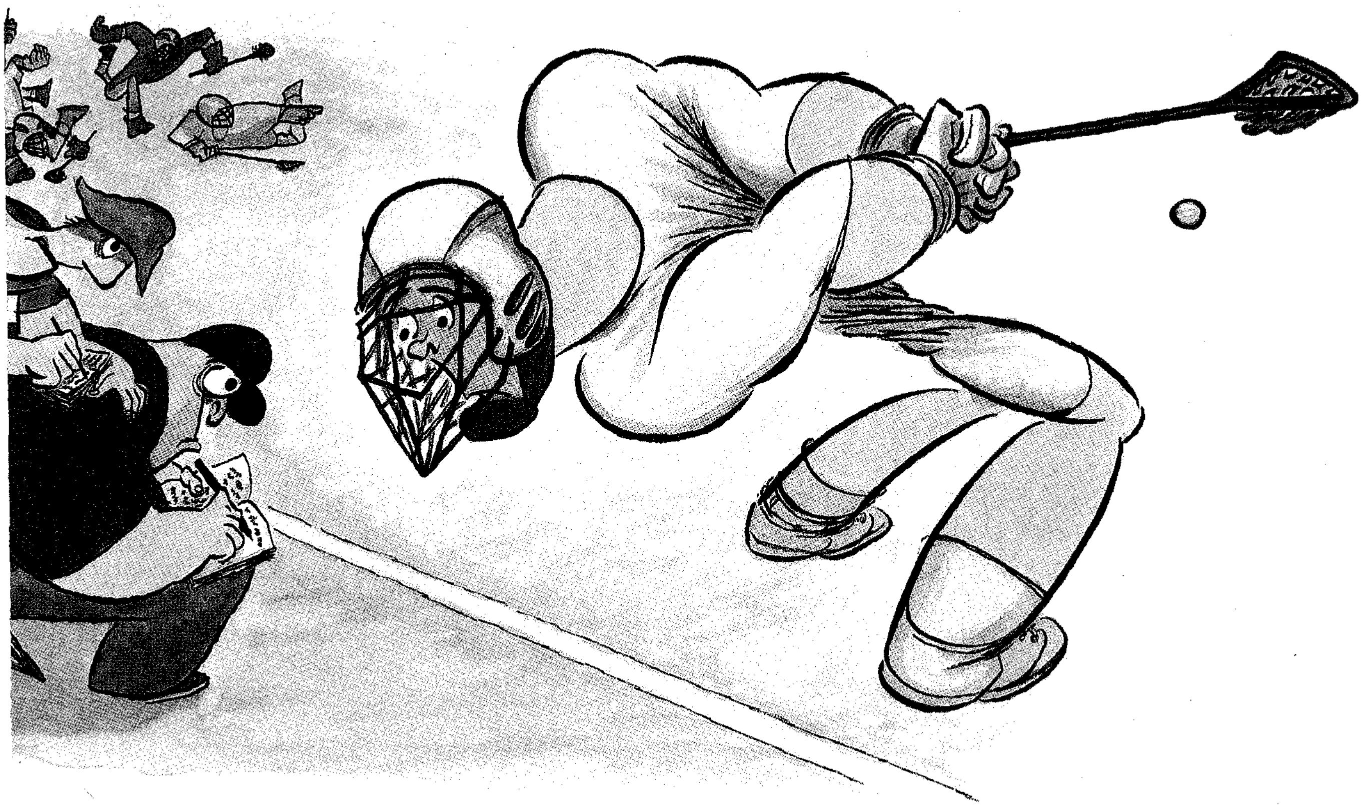
On the first morning, the camp runs one-on-one drills, then half-field scrimmages, then full-field scrimmages, while the camp's own coaches (mainly college assistants) watch. The camp's coaches then pick their teams in a nine-round draft—twenty teams, twenty-two players per team—and these are the units that compete before the visiting buyers.

A kid picks up a ground ball with one hand, saunters toward the crease, and throws a pass away. Fifty coaches write "lazy," or something less flattering.

They very much have in mind the lacrosse I.Q. On a scale from zero to a genius pro like the New York Titans' Ryan Boyle, where does a kid register?

great hands smart
stone hands dumb
good skills tough smart
alert
not aware
has a clue
LH moves well has a clue
NTB
slow overaggressive dumb

Sometimes at other lacrosse camps, high-school parents will be seated in grandstands in the presence of college coaches, and maybe looking over the shoulders of coaches at their notes. Princeton's Tierney hopes they think "NTB" means "not too bad." It means "not too bright." A kid can have 2400 S.A.T.s and a medal from the National Science Foundation and still be not too bright. He moves in a disadvantageous direction. He thinks in



actice in front of as many as two hundred college coaches, who record their skills and defects in almost cryptographic shorthand.

ARNOLD ROTH

the present rather than the future. He "gets mentally in trouble, makes a bad decision with the ball." "LH" means "left-handed."

good skills dumb dodger
good vision
quick dumb w/ ball
good eyes
not bad sees field
good skills athletic understands game

Tierney, on his clipboard, primarily assesses size, speed, and skills. He recognizes four speeds: slow, average, fast, and burner. "A kid can be small if he's fast, but not if he isn't." Size includes huge, midget, meatball, stocky, gross, dumpy, and thick-ass dodger. Among skills are bad stick, average stick, and great stick. "Size, speed, skills—you need two out of three. You can improve stick, but not the other two."

Since the nineteen-eighties, the number of summer lacrosse camps has gone from under forty to more than four hundred. Tuition at the 205 camp is five hundred and ninety-five dollars. The University of Maryland understands math, baking, and how to slice a pie. It feeds the kids nine meals. They sleep in un-air-conditioned dorm rooms, and drag their mattresses into air-conditioned common rooms.

loves to shoot
dumb shooter
good dodger/bad shooter
black hole
tough kid athletic run by anyone bad shooter
black hole, not aware
chucker

A black hole never gives up the ball and a chucker shoots every time he gets the ball.

In 1881, *Harper's Weekly* recalled the near-demise of lacrosse a decade earlier, when "physicians described the dangers of such fast and long-continued running, and anxious parents tried to smother the game in its infancy." Now, at 205 camps, parents wait outside the fence for the arrival of the college coaches and hand them DVDs of their sons' lacrosse highlights. Bill Tierney receives a fair number of DVDs and similar souvenirs ("Are you the Princeton coach?"). "Recruiting is a long-term investment," he says, speaking from his side of the fence. At any given time, he is in contact with six hundred kids—"kids who write us, and kids we write to."

Understanding goalies:

good poise good position
quick hands
not bad stopper
oversteps w/ right foot
drops hands on high shot smart talks too much

Players on defense:

very big, athletic, lazy on D
overaggressive
tall thin good slide fast rough
smallish good stick sees field no hustle on D
bad feet
good feet
no feet too much stick
slapper

Three of the many crucial matters in the attack and the midfield are T&R, no beat, and bag. Like a great open shooter in basketball, if a guy has time and room, he is going to do something positive. If he is "no beat," he is not going to get past any defender. If he has "bag" written all over him, he has a big sloppy pocket and he throws bad passes.

Appraisals of the offense:

good skills very solid smooth slick hangs perimeter
nifty stick
just catch & finish, no dodge
big good passer, awkward LH shot
slow no shot no dodge
good size quick shots
RH good skills dumb dodger
bad approaches
skinny feeder gets in the way no move
quick moves good vision 2-hander
quick aware fair skills

I cannot resist revealing the name of "quick aware fair skills." From Canandaigua, New York, he is Tom LaCrosse.

good size athletic wants RH no finish
good cutter
athletic tough physical covers ground
LH tough hard nose vg stick
vg off ball
not a ball carrier
good skills LH quick COD
explosive very quick good skills RH side arm drop
slick in traffic, dances

"COD" is "change of direction." "Sidearm drop" is not a large compliment. A lacrosse ball is more likely to end up where the thrower intends it to if his stick goes through a vertical plane. If you lower the stick and wing a sidearm shot, the ball may end up breaking a window somewhere. The great shooters shoot on any plane. Others that imitate them drive their coaches nuts.

In the University of Maryland's Women's Lacrosse and Field Hockey Stadium, under lights in the deep evening of Day 3, twenty-two selected players play against twenty-two other selected players in an All Star game. Eight are from the region of Baltimore and Washington. Six are from Long Island. The high schools of the others are scattered from Connecticut to California, Michigan, Ohio, Georgia, Tennessee. Division I lacrosse coaches are especially attracted by this game. Nearly all present are standing near the end lines—three times as many coaches as players on the two teams. Sitting in the bleachers are about five hundred other spectators. Some are parents and siblings of the players, but most of them are the four hundred campers who were not chosen for the game.

And what a game. Goal answering goal. Fast. Full of isododging, inside rolls, two-on-ones, and Gilman clears. Some of the college coaches are far enough along in recruiting talks with some of these high-school stars that they have come to regard them as theirs. A rising senior much in Tierney's field of vision is Forest Sonnenfeldt, who is six feet six, weighs two hundred and forty pounds, and plays in the attack. Among the several things that are unusual about Sonnenfeldt is that he goes to school in the Bronx and lives in Manhattan. In the geography of lacrosse, his would-be college coach says, "a first-rate player from New York City is something very rare." Sonnenfeldt scores. The other team scores. Sonnenfeldt scores again. He moves well. He is hard to stop. He is "finisher big target RH shooter good skills."

The game will end in a tie and be resolved in overtime. Meanwhile, though, notice big Dave Cottle, head coach of the University of Maryland, who grew up in the row houses of Baltimore, played at Salisbury (on the Eastern Shore), and is one of the five winningest coaches active in the game. As he watches, a rising high-school senior, cradling right-handed, goes into a rocker step, does an inside roll, sprints left, dives headlong, shoots, scores.

Someone says to Dave Cottle, "Is he one of yours?"

And Cottle says, "Not yet." ♦

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ANNALS OF LAW

NO MORE MR. NICE GUY

The Supreme Court's stealth hard-liner.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

When John G. Roberts, Jr., emerges from behind the red curtains and takes his place in the middle of the Supreme Court bench, he usually wears a pair of reading glasses, which he peers over to see the lawyers arguing before him. It's an old-fashioned look for the Chief Justice of the United States, who is fifty-four, but, even with the glasses, there's no mistaking that Roberts is the youngest person on the Court. (John Paul Stevens, the senior Associate Justice, who sits to Roberts's right, is thirty-five years older.) Roberts's face is unlined, his shoulders are broad and athletic, and only a few wisps of gray hair mark him as changed in any way from the judge who charmed the Senate Judiciary Committee at his confirmation hearing, in 2005.

On April 29th, the last day of arguments for the Court's current term, the Justices heard Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 v. Holder, a critical case about the future of the Voting Rights Act. Congress originally passed the law in 1965, and three years ago overwhelmingly passed its latest reauthorization, rejecting arguments that improvements in race relations had rendered the act unnecessary. Specifically, the bill, signed by President George W. Bush in 2006, kept in place Section 5 of the law, which says that certain jurisdictions, largely in the Old South, have to obtain the approval of the Justice Department before making any changes to their electoral rules, from the location of polling places to the boundaries of congressional districts. A small utility district in Texas challenged that part of the law, making the same argument that members of Congress had just discounted—that this process, known as preclearance, amounted to a form of discrimination against the citizens of the New South.

Roberts said little to the lawyer for the plaintiff, but when Neal K. Katyal, the Deputy Solicitor General, took to the lectern to defend the Voting Rights Act, the Chief Justice pounced. "As I understand it, one-twentieth of one per cent of the submissions are not precleared," Roberts said. "That, to me, suggests that they are sweeping far more broadly than they need to to address the intentional discrimination under the Fifteenth Amendment"—which guarantees the right to vote regardless of race.

"I disagree with that, Mr. Chief Justice," Katyal said. "I think what it represents is that Section 5 is actually working very well—that it provides a deterrent." According to Katyal, the fact that the Justice Department cleared almost all electoral changes proved, in effect, that the South had been trained, if not totally reformed.

Roberts removed his glasses and stared down at Katyal. "That's like the old elephant whistle," he said. "You know, 'I have this whistle to keep away the elephants.' You know, well, that's silly. 'Well, there are no elephants, so it must work.' "

Roberts was relentless in challenging Katyal: "So your answer is that Congress can impose this disparate treatment forever because of the history in the South?"

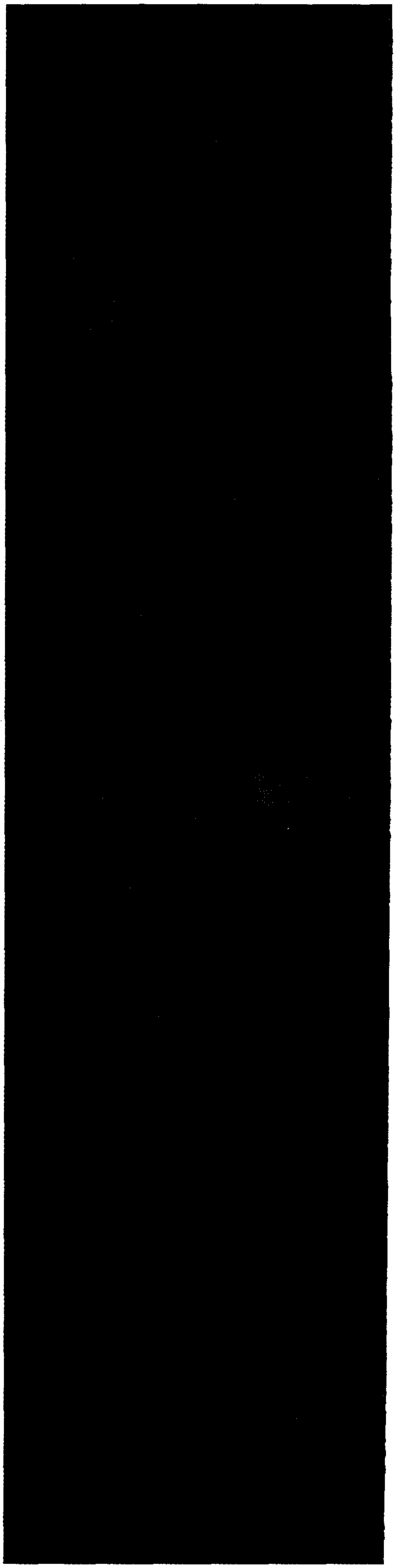
"Absolutely not," Katyal said.

"When can they—when do they have to stop?"

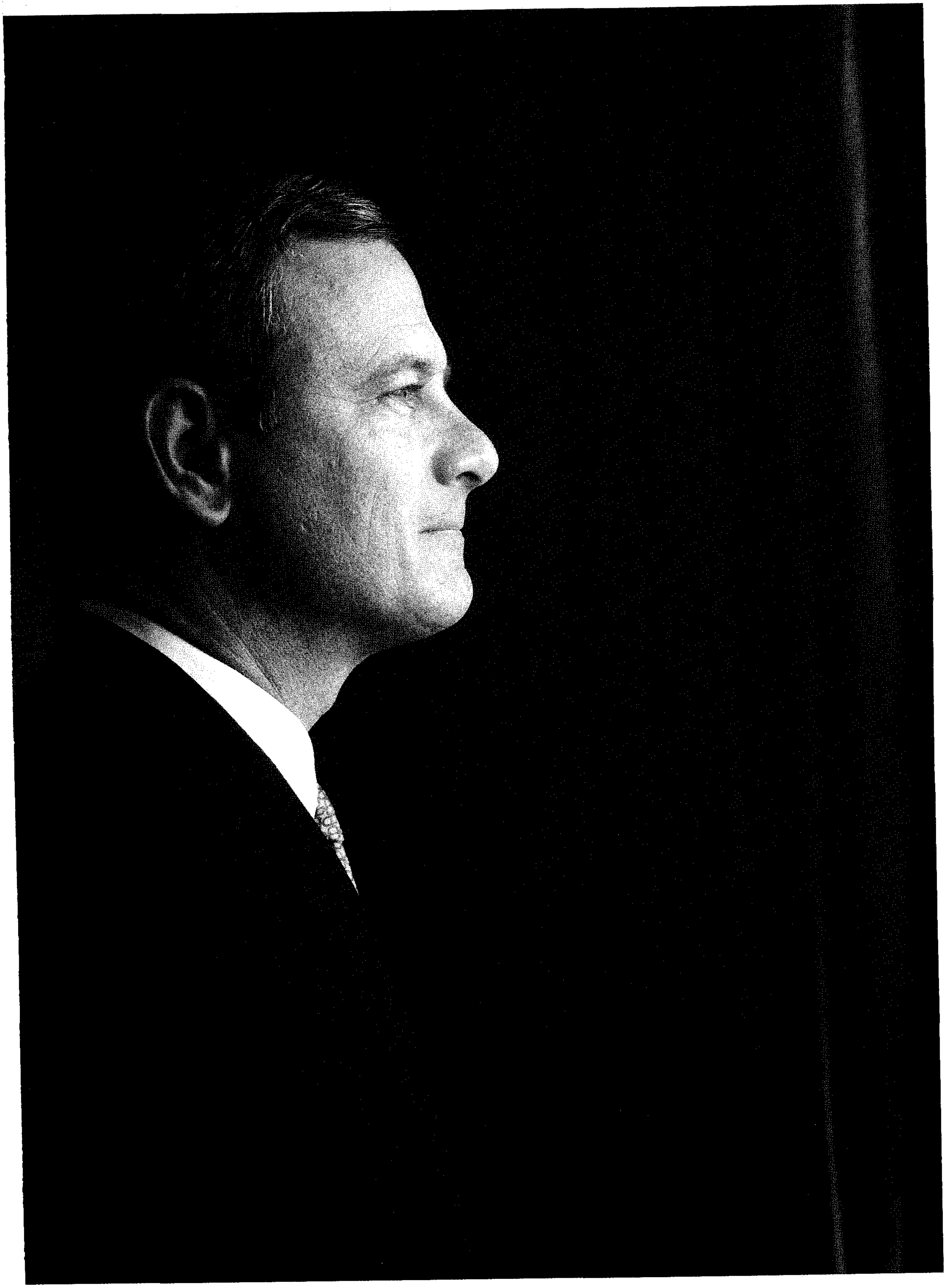
"Congress here said that twenty-five years was the appropriate reauthorization period."

"Well, they said five years originally, and then another twenty years," Roberts said, referring to previous reauthorizations of the act. "I mean, at some point it begins to look like the idea is that this is going to go on forever."

And this, ultimately, was the source of Roberts's frustration—and not just in this case. In a series of decisions in the past



Chief Justice John Roberts, in 2007. Photograph by Steve Pyke.



CONTOUR BY GETTY

"You don't need to sacrifice good grammar in order to talk dirty."

• •

four years, the Chief Justice has expressed the view that the time has now passed when the Court should allow systemic remedies for racial discrimination. The previous week, the Court heard a challenge by a group of white firefighters in New Haven who were denied promotions even though they had scored better than black applicants on a test. Roberts was, if anything, even more belligerent in questioning the lawyer defending the city. "Now, why is this not intentional discrimination?" he asked. "You are going to have to explain that to me again, because there are particular individuals here," he said. "And they say they didn't get their jobs because of intentional racial action by the city." He added, "You maybe don't care whether it's Jones or Smith who is not getting the promotion," he said. "All you care about is who is getting the promotion. All you care about is his race."

When Antonin Scalia joined the Court, in 1986, he brought a new gladiatorial spirit to oral arguments, and in subsequent years the Justices have often used their questions as much for campaign speeches as for requests for information. Roberts, though, has taken this practice to an extreme, and now, even more than the effervescent Scalia, it is the Chief Justice, with his slight Midwestern twang, who dominates the Court's public sessions.

Roberts's hard-edged performance at oral argument offers more than just a rhetorical contrast to the rendering of himself that he presented at his confirmation hearing. "Judges are like umpires," Roberts said at the time. "Umpires don't make the rules. They apply them. The role of an umpire and a judge is critical. They make sure everybody plays by the rules. But it is a limited role. Nobody ever went to a ballgame to see the umpire." His jurisprudence as Chief Justice, Roberts said, would be characterized by "modesty and humility." After four years on the Court, however, Roberts's record is not that of a humble moderate but, rather, that of a doctrinaire conservative. The kind of humility that Roberts favors reflects a view that the Court should almost always defer to the existing power relationships in society. In every major case since he became the nation's seventeenth Chief Justice, Roberts has sided with the prosecution over the defendant, the state over the condemned, the executive branch over the legislative, and the corporate defendant over the individual plaintiff. Even more than Scalia, who has embodied judicial conservatism during a generation of service on the Supreme Court, Roberts has served the interests, and reflected the values, of the contemporary Republican Party.

Two days after the argument in the Voting Rights Act case, David H. Souter announced his resignation, giving President Barack Obama his first chance to nominate a Justice to the Court. The first Democratic nominee to the Court in fifteen years will confront what is now, increasingly, John Roberts's Court. Along with Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Samuel A. Alito, Jr., and (usually) Anthony Kennedy, the majority of the Court is moving right as the rest of the country—or, at least, the rest of the federal government—is moving left. At this low moment in the historical reputation of George W. Bush, his nominee for Chief Justice stands in signal contrast to what appears today to be a failed and fading tenure as President. Roberts's service on the Court, which is, of course, likely to continue for decades, offers an enduring and faithful reflection of the Bush Presidency.

The Justices of the Supreme Court, as a rule, spare themselves unnecessary tedium. Their public hearings are lean and to the point; they hear lawyers' arguments and, later, announce their decisions. Still, one relic of more leisurely times remains. Several times a month, before the start of the day's oral arguments, the Justices allow attorneys to be sworn in as members of the Supreme Court bar in person, a process that can take fifteen minutes. (Most lawyers now conduct the swearing-in process by mail.) Rehnquist barely tolerated the practice, rushing through it and mumbling the names, and several colleagues (notably Souter) display an ostentatious boredom that verges on rudeness.

John Roberts, in contrast, welcomes each new lawyer with a smile, and when fathers or mothers put forth their lawyer children for admission—a tradition of sorts at the Court—the Chief makes sure to acknowledge "your son" and "your daughter" on the record. Everyone beams. It's a small thing, of course, but just one example of Roberts's appealing behavior in public, much as the nation viewed it during his testimony before the Judiciary Committee. At the time, Senator Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat who voted against Roberts's confirmation, nonetheless observed that he was so ingratiating that he had "retired the trophy" for performance by a judicial nominee. When, early in his tenure, a light bulb exploded in the courtroom in the middle of a hearing, Roberts quipped, "It's a trick they play on new Chief Justices all the time." Laughter broke the tension.

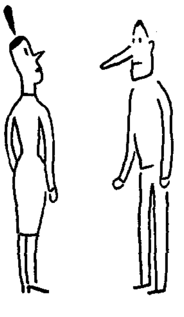
Roberts was born in Buffalo on January 27, 1955, and raised in northern Indiana, where his father was an executive with a steel company and his mother a homemaker. (He has three sisters.) Jackie, as he was known, was educated at Catholic schools, and graduated from La Lumiere, at the time an all-boys parochial boarding school in LaPorte. He was the classic well-rounded star student—valedictorian and captain of the football team. He went on to Harvard, majored in history, and graduated in three years, summa cum laude.

At Harvard Law School, Roberts continued to excel, in an even more competitive atmosphere. "He was extremely smart," said Laurence Tribe, the liberal scholar who taught Roberts constitutional law and grew to know him through his work on the *Law Review*. "He was really very good at being thoughtful and careful and not particularly conspicuous. He was very lawyerly, even as a law student." In the mid-seventies, the atmosphere at Harvard still reflected the tumult of the sixties. Roberts stood out as a conservative, though not a notably intense one. "On the *Law Review*, John was the managing editor, so that meant he gave us our work assignments every day," Elizabeth Geise, who was a year behind Roberts in law school, said. "He was very honest, straightforward, lot of integrity, fair. He was conservative, and we all knew that. That was unusual in those days. You couldn't think of a guy who was a straighter arrow." After graduating magna cum laude, in 1979, Roberts first clerked for Henry J. Friendly, of the federal appeals court in New York, who was legendary for his scholarship and erudition, but was not known as an especially partisan figure.

From New York, Roberts moved to the Supreme Court, where he became a clerk for Associate Justice William H. Rehnquist, and it was in Washington that his political education began. Rehnquist, appointed by Richard Nixon in 1972, was, in his first decade as a Justice, almost a fringe right-wing figure on the Court, which was then dominated by William J. Brennan, Jr. But Ronald Reagan's election to the Presidency, which took place just a few months into Roberts's clerkship, lifted Rehnquist to power and, more broadly, gave flight to the conservative legal movement.

At that early stage of the Reagan era, conservatives had a problem, because there were no institutions where like-minded lawyers could be nurtured; the Federalist Society, the conservative legal group, was not founded until 1982. "Roberts got a lot of attention because he clerked for Rehnquist," said Steven Teles, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins and the author of "The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement." "Without the Federalist Society, there were not a lot of other ways for the Administration to make sure that they were getting true conservatives. The Rehnquist clerkship marked Roberts as someone who could be trusted."

As a former law clerk to Rehnquist, not to mention his immediate successor as Chief Justice, Roberts was an obvious choice to deliver the annual lecture named for Rehnquist at the University of Arizona law school in February. Roberts is a gifted public speaker—relaxed, often funny, sometimes self-deprecating—and he began his speech with a warm remembrance of his mentor. Like Barack Obama, Roberts can make reading from a prepared text look almost spontaneous. "I first met William Rehnquist more than twenty-eight years ago," he told the audience in Tucson. "The initial meeting left a strong impression on me. Justice Rehnquist was friendly and unpretentious. He wore scuffed Hush Puppy shoes. That was my first lesson. Clothes do not make the man. The Justice sported long sideburns and Buddy Holly glasses long after they were fashionable. And he wore loud ties that I am confident were never fashionable."

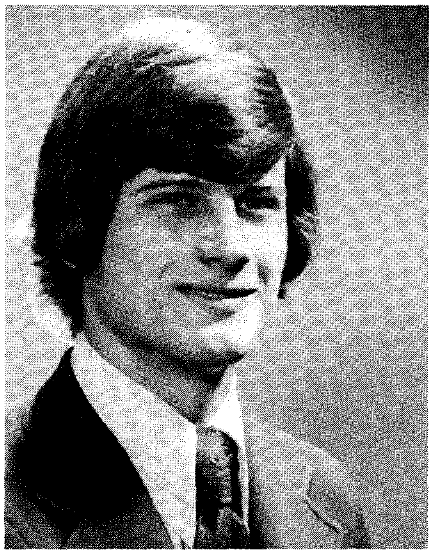


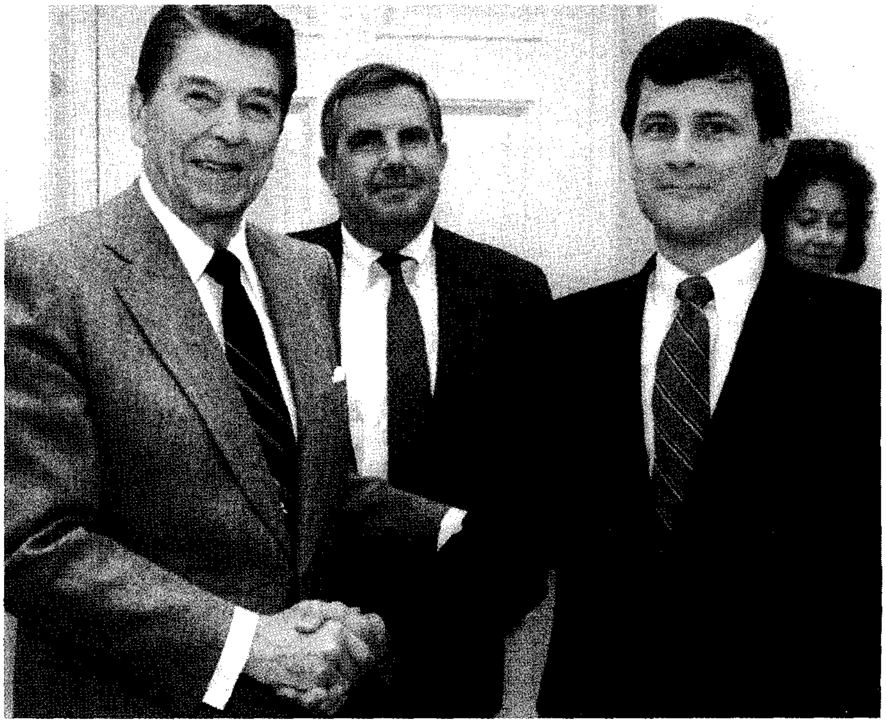
Before long, though, Roberts steered away from nostalgic reverie and into constitutional controversy. He maintained his relaxed and conversational cadence, but his words reflected a sharply partisan world view. "When Justice Rehnquist came onto the Court, I think it's fair to say that the practice of constitutional law—how constitutional law was made—was more fluid and wide-ranging than it is today, more in the realm of political science," Roberts said. "Now, over Justice Rehnquist's time on the Court, the method of analysis and argument shifted to the more solid grounds of legal arguments—what are the texts of the statutes involved, what precedents control. Rehnquist, a student both of political science and the law, was significantly responsible for that seismic shift." Rehnquist joined the Court toward the end of its liberal heyday—the era when the Justices expanded civil-rights protections for minorities, established new barriers between church and state, and, most famously, recognized a constitutional right to abortion for women. This period, in Roberts's telling, was the bad old days.

These sentiments reflect a common view for conservatives like Roberts. "There really was a sense at the time among the lawyers in his Administration that Reagan had a mandate for comprehensive change in the nature of government," Teles said. "They thought a lot of what the liberals had done in creating, say, affirmative action was simply interest-group politics and not really 'law' at all, and it was their job to restore professionalism to the legal profession in government."

"I heard about John, and I immediately tried to hire him," Charles Fried, the Harvard law professor who was Reagan's second Solicitor General, said. Kenneth Starr, who was chief of staff to William French Smith, Reagan's Attorney General, had hired Roberts as a special assistant to Smith. Roberts then went to work at the White House, as an associate counsel.

All the lawyers who worked for Reagan were, in some general sense, conservative, but there is a difference between those, like Roberts, who came of age during Reagan's first term in office and those who prospered in his second. "The Department of Justice in the first term was full of serious, principled people," Teles said. "They didn't see themselves as part of the Christian right, or even necessarily part of a larger political movement, but they did think of themselves as real lawyers who were reacting to what they thought of as the excesses of liberalism." They believed, Teles said, "in what they called judicial restraint and strict constructionism. Roberts comes out of this world." Liberal critics, in turn, regard this view as unduly deferential to the status quo and thus a kind of abdication of the judicial role.





Above: Roberts in high school, where he was valedictorian and football captain. Right: as Associate Counsel in the Reagan White House, in 1986. Far right: the Court's current Justices, in 2006.

LEFT: LA LUMIERE SCHOOL/AP; RIGHT: COURTESY RONALD REAGAN LIBRARY

The legal philosophy of Edwin Meese III, which promoted an "originalist" view of the Constitution, dominated Reagan's second term. Originalists, whose ranks now include Scalia and Thomas, believe that the Constitution should be interpreted in line with the intentions and beliefs of its framers. "John was not part of the Meese crowd," one lawyer who worked with Roberts in the Reagan years said. "They cared more about a strict separation of powers, and even some limitations on executive and government power."

Originalists and judicial-restraint conservatives generally reach similar conclusions on legal issues, but their reasoning differs. Both, for example, believe that the Constitution does not protect a woman's right to abortion. "An originalist on abortion would say that at the time of the Constitution, or of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment, abortion was prohibited, and that's it," Akhil Reed Amar, a professor at Yale Law School, said. "A conservative like Roberts, on the other hand, wouldn't look immediately at the question of whether all abortions should be outlawed, but examine the specific restriction on abortion rights at issue in the case and probably uphold it. He'd avoid the culture-war rhetoric and gradually begin cutting back on abortion rights without making lots of noise about getting rid of it altogether." In 2007, Roberts joined Kennedy's opinion that followed this approach in upholding a federal anti-abortion law. The Court's two originalists, Scalia and Thomas, wrote a separate concurring opinion in that case, urging, as they had before, that Roe v. Wade be overturned once and for all.

In documents from the Reagan era that were made public during Roberts's confirmation hearing, the young lawyer emerges as a loyal (and low-level) foot soldier in the Reagan revolution. On issues where there was disagreement within the Administration, Roberts's memos generally show him supporting the more conservative position, especially on matters of race and civil rights. Roberts said that affirmative action required the "recruiting of inadequately prepared candidates," and sought a narrow scope for Title IX, the law that mandates equal rights for men and women in educational settings. In 1981, Roberts wrote that a revision of the Voting Rights Act would "establish essentially a quota system for electoral politics by creating a right to proportional racial representation." (Reagan signed the revision anyway.)

Roberts's reputation soared in his White House years. "He was already on that superstar trajectory," said Henny Wright, a lawyer, now living in Dallas, who became friends with Roberts in Washington at the time. "He was pretty much like he is today, except without the bald spot. Extremely attractive, in every sense of the word. He's smart, he's funny, he's gregarious, he's good-looking. In those days, he was never too busy to play a round of golf. He's not a very good golfer, but, unlike a lot of golfers, he doesn't let that ruin his day or your day." Roberts's wit even came through in the usually stultifying format of the interoffice memo. In 1983, Fred Fielding, the White House counsel, asked Roberts to evaluate a proposal then in circulation to create a kind of super appeals court to assist the Supreme Court with its ostensibly pressing workload. In response, Roberts noted, "While some of the tales of woe emanating from the court are enough to bring tears to the eyes, it is true that only Supreme Court justices and schoolchildren are expected to and do take the entire summer off."

With the completion of oral arguments in the Voting Rights Act case, the Court has now entered the most contentious weeks of its year. The Justices almost always save their most controversial cases for the end of the term, and this year tensions may run higher than usual. For starters, the Supreme Court Building is now in the sixth year of a renovation—the first since it was dedicated, in 1935—that has forced each of the Justices to move to temporary chambers. The Justices do not take kindly to such disruptions, especially because they are now, by historical standards, a very old Court. John Paul Stevens just turned eighty-nine, and four Justices (Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Scalia, Kennedy, and Stephen Breyer) are in their seventies. The renovation project will also involve closing the entrance to the Court at the top of its iconic front steps—a change that is said to be a security measure but that several Justices regard as a distressing symbol. Souter's impending departure, and unknown replacement, is another source of anxiety.

CHARLES OMMANNEY/GETTY

The substance of the Court's work, of course, contributes most to the strains among the Justices. The Chief Justice has not yet embraced one particular judicial principle as his special interest—in the way that Rehnquist chose federalism and states' rights—but Roberts is clearly moved by the subject of race, as illustrated by his combative performance during the Texas and New Haven arguments. His concerns reflect the views that prevailed at the Reagan White House: that the government should ignore historical or even continuing inequities and never recognize or reward individuals on the basis of race. In a recent case, a majority of the Justices applied a provision of the Voting Rights Act to reject part of a Texas redistricting plan that was found to hurt Hispanic voters. Roberts dissented from that decision, writing, in an unusually direct expression of disgust, "It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race."

Race was also at the center of the most important opinion so far in his career as Chief Justice—a case that also displayed his pugnacious style in oral argument. Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 concerned a challenge to the city's racial-integration plan. The Seattle plan assigned students to schools based on a variety of factors, including how close the student lived to the school and whether siblings already attended, but the goal of maintaining racial diversity was considered as well. At the oral argument, on December 4, 2006, the Chief Justice tore into Michael F. Madden, the lawyer for the Seattle school district.

"You don't defend the choice policy on the basis that the schools offer education to everyone of the same quality, do you?" he asked, and Madden said that he did defend it on those grounds.

"How is that different from the 'separate but equal' argument?" Roberts went on. "In other words, it doesn't matter that they're being assigned on the basis of their race because they're getting the same type of education."

"Well, because the schools are not racially separate," the lawyer said. "The goal is to maintain the diversity that existed within a broad range in order to try to obtain the benefits that the educational research shows flow from an integrated education."

Roberts wouldn't let the issue go. "Well, you're saying every—I mean, everyone got a seat in Brown as well; but, because they were assigned to those seats on the basis of race, it violated equal protection. How is your argument that there's no problem here because everybody gets a seat distinguishable?"

"Because segregation is harmful," Madden said. "Integration, as this Court has recognized . . . has benefits."

In the Seattle case, the Court ruled by a five-to-four vote that the integration plan did indeed violate the equal-protection clause of the Constitution, and Roberts assigned himself the opinion. The Chief Justice said that the result in the Seattle case was compelled by perhaps the best-known decision in the Court's history, Brown v. Board of Education. In that ruling, in 1954, the Court held that school segregation was unconstitutional and rejected the claim that segregated schools were "separate but equal." In Roberts's view, there was no legal difference between the intentionally segregated public schools of Topeka, Kansas, at issue in Brown, and the integration plan in Seattle, five decades later. In the most famous passage so far of his tenure as Chief Justice, Roberts wrote, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race."

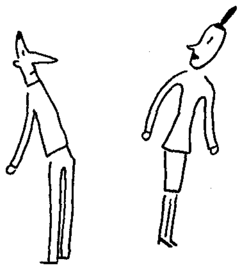
Roberts's opinion drew an incredulous dissent from Stevens, who said that the Chief Justice's words reminded him of "Anatole France's observation" that the "majestic equality" of the law forbade "rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread." For dozens of years, the Court had drawn a clear distinction between laws that kept black students out of white schools (which were forbidden) and laws that directed black and white students to study together (which were allowed); Roberts's decision sought to eliminate that distinction and, more generally, called into question whether any race-conscious actions by government were still constitutional. "It is my firm conviction that no Member of the Court that I joined in 1975 would have agreed with today's decision," Stevens concluded.

In Roberts's first term, when Alito also joined the Court, there were fewer controversial cases than usual, as well as an apparent effort by the Justices to reach more unanimous decisions. But the Seattle case came down on June 28, 2007, which was the last day of Roberts's second full term as Chief Justice and a year of routs for liberals on the Court. That same day, the Justices overturned a ninety-six-year-old precedent in antitrust law and thus made it harder to prove collusion by corporations. Also that year they upheld the federal Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, in Kennedy's opinion, even though the Court had rejected a nearly identical law just seven years earlier. The case of Ledbetter v. Goodyear, brought by a sympathetic grandmother who had been paid far less than men doing the same work at the tire company, became a political flashpoint because the conservative majority, in an opinion by Alito, imposed seemingly insurmountable new burdens on plaintiffs in employment-discrimination lawsuits. (Ginsburg, in an unusual move, read her dissent from the bench.) In all these cases, Roberts and Alito joined with Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Kennedy to make the majority. On this final day, Breyer offered an unusually public rebuke to his new colleagues. "It is not often in the law that so few have so quickly changed so much," Breyer said.

Roberts's sure-handed sense of public relations has deserted him only once during his tenure so far. The Chief Justice, as the leader of the federal judiciary, is obligated to prepare an annual report, which historically has been a fairly anodyne document—a set of modest requests to Congress, like faster confirmation of judges or new construction funds for courthouses. In 2006, however, Roberts devoted his entire report to arguing for raises for federal judges, and he even went so far as to call the status quo on salaries a "constitutional crisis." Most federal judges are paid a hundred and sixty-nine thousand dollars, and at that point they had not had a real raise in fifteen years. This request to Congress was universally popular among Roberts's colleagues, who were long used to watching their law clerks exceed their own salaries in their first year of private practice.

Congress, however, snubbed the Chief Justice. Six-figure salaries, lifetime tenure, and the opportunity to retire at full pay did not look inadequate to the elected officials, who make the same amount as judges and must face ordinary voters. Roberts's blindness on the issue may owe something to his having inhabited a rarefied corner of Washington for the past three decades.

In 1986, after his service in the Reagan White House, Roberts went to the Washington law firm of Hogan & Hartson, where he developed a successful practice as an appellate advocate. "John's a very, very conservative fellow, and I'm the opposite, but that was never a problem for us," E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr., a longtime partner at the firm and a co-counsel with Roberts on dozens of cases, said. "Our work was mostly corporate, some criminal, a few individuals as clients. The key to his success was that he was very clear, very articulate, and never confusing."



When George H. W. Bush won the Presidency, in 1988, his new Solicitor General, Kenneth Starr, hired Roberts again, this time as his principal deputy. Near the end of the first Bush's term, Roberts was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, but Democrats in the Senate, sensing a victory in the approaching 1992 election, refused to let him come up for a vote. So, for Bill Clinton's eight years in office, Roberts went back to Hogan & Hartson, where, according to his financial-disclosure forms, he made more than a million dollars a year. In 1996, Roberts, then forty-one, married Jane Sullivan, a fellow-lawyer, also in her forties, who now works as a legal recruiter. In 2000, they adopted two children, who are both now eight years old.

While at Hogan, Roberts became a lunchtime regular at the table of J. William Fulbright, the former Arkansas senator, in the firm's cafeteria. Fulbright was affiliated with Hogan from the time of his departure from office, in 1974, until his death, in 1995, and he presided over a salon of sorts for partners with an interest in politics. "It was a politically diverse group, and they'd just get together and talk about the issues of the day," David Leitch, who was also a partner at Hogan, said. "John is interested in political issues, he is interested in the process of politics. He used to like to handicap elections." Roberts took a direct role in the contested 2000 election, travelling to Tallahassee to assist George W. Bush's legal team in the recount litigation. He was rewarded for his efforts the following year, when Bush, like his father before him, nominated Roberts to the D.C. Circuit. He was confirmed two years later, and he served there until Bush chose him for the Supreme Court.

In one respect, Roberts's series of prestigious jobs all amounted to doing the same thing for more than twenty years—reading and writing appellate briefs and, later, appellate decisions. During the heart of his career, Roberts's circle of professional peers consisted en-

HUMMINGBIRD

1.
Shunt and plumb bob, a whirring top
That keeps touching down on its pivot.

Wings, the book says, like *blurry gauze.*
The long thin nectar-threading bill

Of a bird that backs off only to start again
From its still point in midair.

The revved-up, head-first metabolism.
The stone at the throat like a heart.

2.
High in the Altiplano, its wings spread
Hundreds of feet across, a hummingbird
Flies among the sky-faced drawings
The Nazca paced off on their tarmac.

3.
Walk me through something like that.

—*Robert Gibb*

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tirely of other wealthy and accomplished lawyers. In this world, a hundred and sixty-nine thousand dollars a year might well look like an unconscionably low wage. "Some judges have actually left the bench because they could make more money in private practice, and some Justices have complained privately about how it's almost impossible to educate your family on that kind of money," Prettyman said. "You don't want an unhappy court, judges who are worried about their salaries. John saw that."

Roberts's career as a lawyer marked him in other ways as well. In private practice and in the first Bush Administration, a substantial portion of his work consisted of representing the interests of corporate defendants who were sued by individuals. For example, shortly before Roberts became a judge, he successfully argued in the Supreme Court that a woman who suffered from carpal-tunnel syndrome could not win a recovery from her employer, Toyota, under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Likewise, Roberts won a Supreme Court ruling that the family of a woman who died in a fire could not use the federal wrongful-death statute to sue the city of Tarrant, Alabama. In a rare loss in his thirty-nine arguments before the Court, Roberts failed to persuade the Justices to uphold a sixty-four-million-dollar fine against the United Mine Workers, which was imposed by a Virginia court after a strike.

One case that Roberts argued during his tenure in the Solicitor General's office in George H. W. Bush's Administration, Lujan v. National Wildlife Federation, seems to have had special resonance for him. The issue involved the legal doctrine known as "standing"—one of many subjects before the Supreme Court that appear to be just procedural in nature but are in fact freighted with political significance. "One of the distinctive things about American courts is that we have all these gatekeeper provisions that keep courts from getting involved in every single dispute," Samuel Issacharoff, a professor at New York University School of Law, says. "The doctrine of standing says that you only want lawsuits to proceed if the plaintiffs are arguing about a real injury done to them, not simply that they want to be heard on a public-policy question." Liberals and conservatives have been fighting over standing for decades. "Standing is a technical legal doctrine, but it is shorthand for whether courts have a role in policing the conduct of government," Issacharoff says. "Typically, the public-interest advocates, usually on the liberal side of the spectrum, favor very loose standing doctrines, and people who want to protect government from scrutiny, who tend to be on the conservative side, want to require more and more specific standing requirements."

Lujan v. National Wildlife Federation was one of the Rehnquist Court's most important standing cases. The environmental group had challenged the Reagan Administration's effort to make as much as a hundred and eighty million acres of federal land available for mining. In an argument before the Court on April 16, 1990, Roberts said that the mere allegation that a member of the National Wildlife Federation used land "in the vicinity" of the affected acres did not entitle the group to standing to bring the case. "That sort of interest was insufficient to confer standing, because it was in no way distinct from the interest any citizen could claim, coming in the courthouse and saying, 'I'm interested in this subject,' " Roberts told the Justices. By a vote of five to four, the Justices agreed with Roberts and threw out the case. According to Issacharoff, "Lujan was the first big case that said, Just because you are really devoted to a cause like the environment, that doesn't mean we are going to let you into the courthouse."

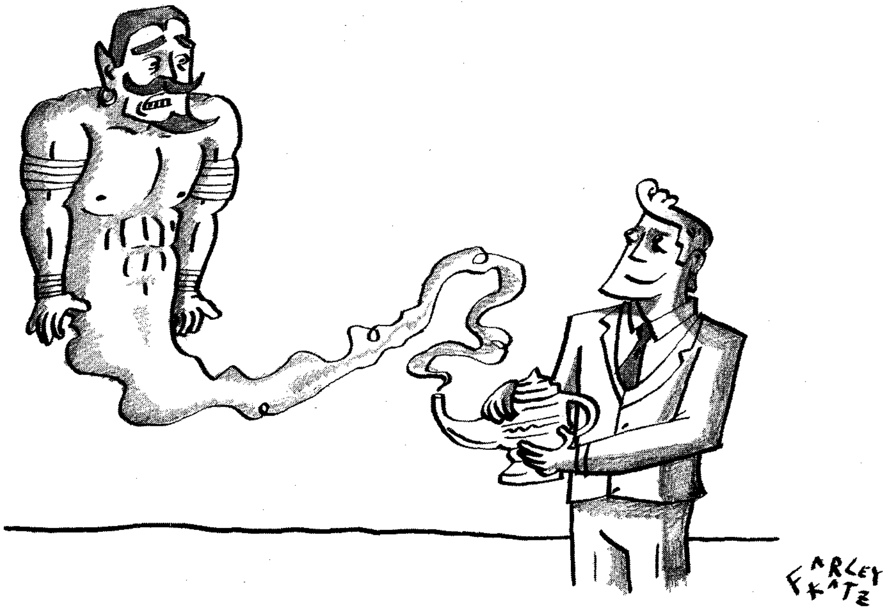
As a lawyer and now as Chief Justice, Roberts has always supported legal doctrines that serve a gatekeeping function. In DaimlerChrysler v. Cuno, a group of taxpayers in Toledo, Ohio, went to court to challenge local tax breaks that were given to the carmaker to expand its operations in the city; the Supreme Court held that the plaintiffs lacked standing. In a broadly worded opinion that relied in part on the Lujan case, Roberts suggested that most state and local activities were off limits to challenge from taxpayers. "Affording state taxpayers standing to press such challenges simply because their tax burden gives them an interest in the state treasury, " Roberts wrote, "would interpose the federal courts as virtually continuing monitors of the wisdom and soundness of state fiscal administration, contrary to the more modest role Article III envisions for federal courts.” As usual with Roberts’s jurisprudence, the citizen plaintiffs were out of luck.

In the past four years, Roberts and Scalia, while voting together most of the time, have had a dialogue of sorts about how best to address the Court’s liberal precedents. For example, Roberts wrote a narrow opinion in 2007 holding that the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance law did not apply to certain political advertisements in Wisconsin. Scalia agreed with Roberts’s conclusion in the case, but he said that the Chief Justice should have gone farther and declared the whole law unconstitutional, on free-speech grounds. Scalia insisted that Roberts was just being coy, that his opinion had in fact overruled an earlier ruling that upheld the campaign-finance law, but that he wouldn’t come out and say it. “This faux judicial restraint is judicial obfuscation,” Scalia wrote.

In a case about the free-speech rights of students, Roberts wrote the opinion approving the suspension of a high-school student in Alaska for holding a sign that said “BONG HiTS 4 JESUS” on a street off school grounds. The Chief Justice said the school had the right to “restrict student speech at a school event, when that speech is reasonably viewed as promoting illegal drug use.” Thomas, characteristically, wrote a concurring opinion urging the Court to go farther and hold that students have no First Amendment rights at all. But the larger point remained that Roberts, Scalia, and Thomas voted together in that case, as they do virtually all the time. “These kinds of distinctions among the conservatives are just angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin stuff,” says Theodore B. Olson, the former Solicitor General, who remains a frequent advocate before the Court. “Roberts is just what he said he would be in his hearing—a judge who believes in humility and judicial restraint.” Like the other conservatives, for instance, Roberts has been a consistent supporter of death sentences, and he wrote the Court’s opinion holding that lethal injection does not amount to the sort of cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the Eighth Amendment. Many liberals, too, feel that Roberts is far more similar to his conservative colleagues than he appeared to be at the time of his confirmation hearing. According to Harvard’s Laurence Tribe, “The Chief Justice talks the talk of moderation while walking the walk of extreme conservatism.”

On issues of Presidential power, Roberts has been to Scalia’s right—a position that’s in keeping with his roots in the Reagan Administration. “John was shaped by working at the White House, where you develop a mind-set of defending Presidential power,” the lawyer who worked with Roberts in the Reagan years said. Just a few days before Bush appointed Roberts to the Supreme Court, in 2005, Roberts joined an opinion on the D.C. Circuit in Hamdan v. Rumsfeld that upheld the Bush Administration’s position on the treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay. (With Roberts recused from the case, the Supreme Court overruled that decision in 2006, by a five-to-three vote, with Kennedy joining the liberals.) Scalia has occasionally shown a libertarian streak, but Roberts, true to his White House past, has consistently voted to uphold the prerogatives of the executive, especially the military, against the other branches. Last year, Roberts dissented from Kennedy’s opinion for a five-to-four Court in Boumediene v. Bush, which held that the Military Commissions Act of 2006 violated the rights of Guantánamo detainees. Roberts saw the case as mostly a contest between the executive branch and the rest of the federal government. “Today the Court strikes down as inadequate the most generous set of procedural protections ever afforded aliens detained by this country as enemy combatants,” Roberts wrote in his dissent. “One cannot help but think . . . that this decision is not really about the detainees at all, but about control of federal policy regarding enemy combatants.”

Roberts’s solicitude for the President and the military extends to lower-profile cases as well. In Winter v. National Resources Defense Council, the question was whether the Navy had to comply with a federal environmental law protecting dolphins and other wildlife while conducting submarine exercises off California. Roberts said no. “We do not discount the importance of plaintiffs’ ecological, scientific, and recreational interests in marine mammals,” the Chief Justice wrote. “Those interests, however, are plainly outweighed by the Navy’s need to conduct realistic training exercises to ensure that it is able to neutralize the threat posed by enemy submarines.” Though Roberts was writing for only a five-to-four majority, he added, “Where the public interest lies does not strike us as a close question.”



“You really just want to watch me punch myself in the face three times?”

On the morning of January 20th, the Supreme Court held a small reception for the Justices and their guests before they all headed across First Street to the Capitol for the Inauguration of Barack Obama. Friends present say that Roberts was nervous that morning. He was used to appearing before crowds, of course, but this was the first time that he would be performing the most public of the Chief Justice's duties—administering the Presidential oath of office—and the audience, in person and by broadcast, would be in the many millions. In keeping with his perfectionist nature, Roberts had rehearsed the oath ceremony and had long since committed the words to memory.

Through intermediaries, Roberts and Obama had agreed how to divide the thirty-five-word oath for the swearing in. Obama was first supposed to repeat the clause "I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear." But, when Obama heard Roberts begin to speak, he interrupted Roberts before he said "do solemnly swear." This apparently flustered the Chief Justice, who then made a mistake in the next line, inserting the word "faithfully" out of order. Obama smiled, apparently recognizing the error, then tried to follow along. Roberts then garbled another word in the next passage, before correctly reciting, "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

At the lunch in the Capitol that followed, the two men apologized to each other, but Roberts insisted that he was the one at fault. For the day, Roberts lost some of his customary equanimity as he brooded about making such a public mistake. (He went to the White House the next day, and the oath was repeated, correctly, to forestall any challenges to its legality.) Since then, Roberts has put the embarrassment behind him and even made it the subject of a little humor at his own expense. On January 26th, he presided over the installation of the new leader of the Smithsonian Institution. "Those of you who have read it will see from the program that the Smithsonian some time ago adopted the passing of a key in lieu of the administration of an oath," Roberts said. "I don't know who was responsible for that decision. But I like him."

Still, the flubbed oath will always link Roberts and Obama, whose lives reflect considerable similarities as well as major differences. They belong to roughly the same generation—Roberts is six years older—and received similar educations. Roberts and Obama graduated from Harvard Law School in 1979 and 1991, respectively—Obama had taken time off to work as a community organizer in Chicago—and both served on the *Law Review*. (Obama was president, the top position; Roberts, in his capacity as managing editor, was just below that.) They share an even-tempered disposition, obvious but unshowy intelligence, and fierce ambition leavened by considerable charm.

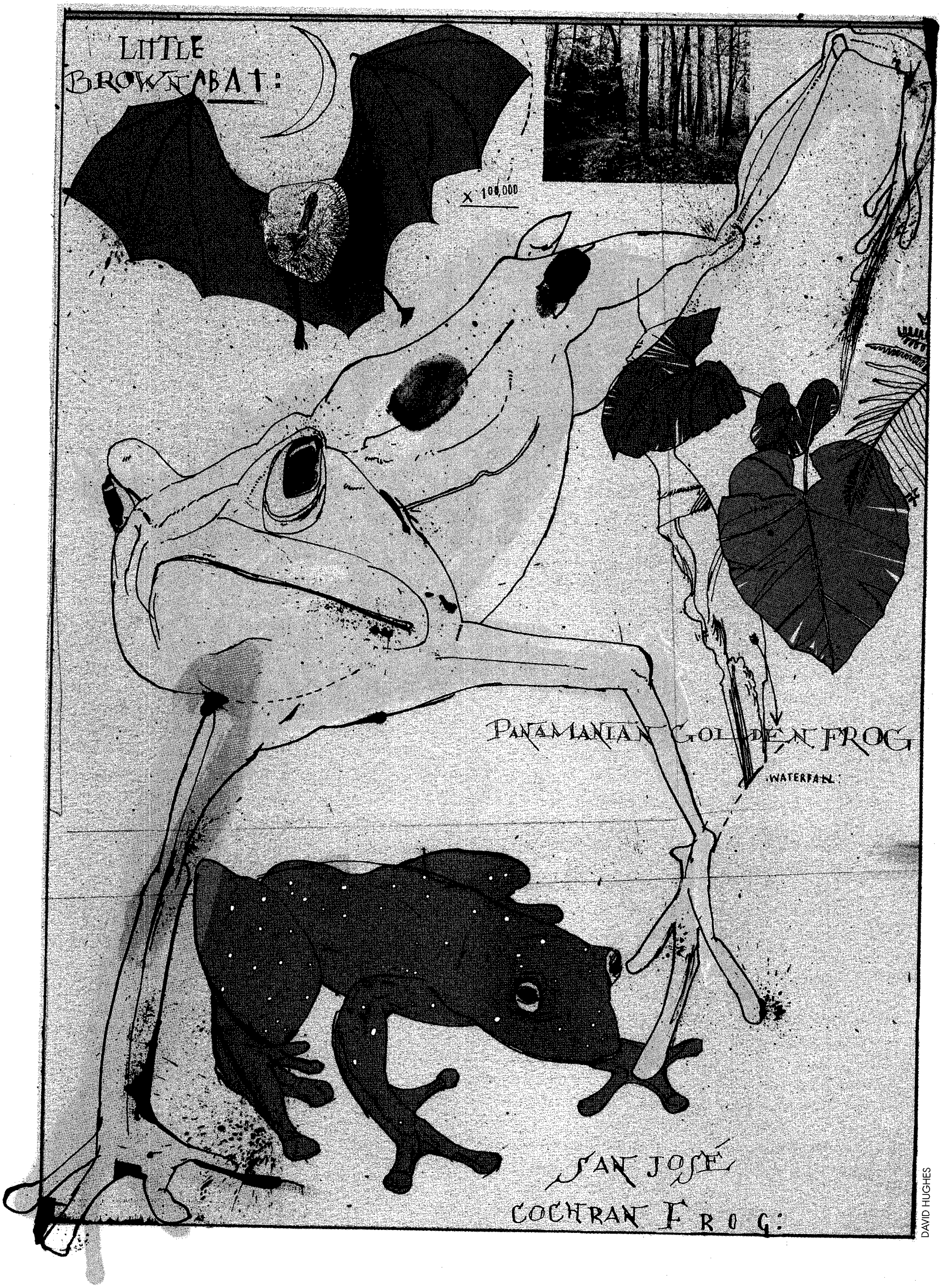
But the distinctions between these two men are just as apparent. Obama is the first President in history to have voted against the confirmation of the Chief Justice who later administered his oath of office. In his Senate speech on that vote, Obama praised Roberts's intellect and integrity and said that he would trust his judgment in about ninety-five per cent of the cases before the Supreme Court. "In those five per cent of hard cases, the constitutional text will not be directly on point. The language of the statute will not be perfectly clear. Legal process alone will not lead you to a rule of decision," Obama said. "In those circumstances, your decisions about whether affirmative action is an appropriate response to the history of discrimination in this country or whether a general right of privacy encompasses a more specific right of women to control their reproductive decisions . . . the critical ingredient is supplied by what is in the judge's heart." Obama did not trust Roberts's heart. "It is my personal estimation that he has far more often used his formidable skills on behalf of the strong in opposition to the weak," the Senator said. The first bill that Obama signed as President was known as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act; it specifically overturned the interpretation of employment law that Roberts had endorsed in the 2007 case.

In a way, Obama offers a mirror image of the view of the Supreme Court that Roberts presented in his tribute to Rehnquist in Tucson. To Obama, what Roberts called the "solid grounds of legal arguments" was only the beginning of constitutional interpretation, not the end. In his statement announcing Souter's resignation, on May 1st, the President defined the qualities he was looking for in a Justice in a very different way from Roberts's description of Rehnquist. "I will seek someone who understands that justice isn't about some abstract legal theory or footnote in a casebook. It is also about how our laws affect the daily realities of people's lives—whether they can make a living and care for their families; whether they feel safe in their homes and welcome in their own nation," Obama said. "I view that quality of empathy, of understanding and identifying with people's hopes and struggles, as an essential ingredient for arriving at just decisions and outcomes."

The differences between Roberts and Obama include such issues as abortion and affirmative action, but they extend beyond such familiar legal battlegrounds to what Roberts called, in his Tucson speech, "the nature of the Court itself." "When Justice Rehnquist went on the Court, a minority of the Justices had been former federal judges," Roberts observed. "Today, for the first time in its history, every member of the Court was a federal court-of-appeals judge before joining the Court—a more legal perspective, and less of a policy perspective."

Obama does not regard the all-former-judge makeup of the Supreme Court as an unalloyed virtue. "The obvious sources of candidates have been people already on the bench and people who are distinguished academic legal scholars and teachers," Gregory Craig, the White House counsel, told me in February. "But he's also looking for lawyers who have been public defenders or prosecutors, or representing points of view with respect to immigration or the Innocence Project. He doesn't think you have to be a member of the circuit courts of appeals to be on the Supreme Court." Obama has spoken fondly of Earl Warren, the fourteenth Chief Justice, who came to the Court from the governorship of California.

When Vice-President Biden publicly mocked Roberts about his gaffe at a ceremony shortly after the Inauguration, Obama shot him a scathing look of rebuke. (Biden later called Roberts to apologize.) Still, there is no disputing that the President and the Chief Justice are adversaries in a contest for control of the Court, and that both men come to that battle well armed. Obama has at most one more chance to take the oath of office, and Roberts will probably have a half-dozen more opportunities to get it right. But each time Roberts walks down the steps of the Capitol to administer the oath, he may well be surrounded—and eventually outvoted—by Supreme Court colleagues appointed by Barack Obama. ♦


LITTLE BROWN BAT:
× 100,000
PANAMANIAN GOLDEN FROG
WATERFALL
SAN JOSÉ
COCHRAN FROG:

DAVID HUGHES

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE SIXTH EXTINCTION?

There have been five great die-offs in history. This time, the cataclysm is us.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

The town of El Valle de Antón, in central Panama, sits in the middle of a volcanic crater formed about a million years ago. The crater is almost four miles across, but when the weather is clear you can see the jagged hills that surround the town, like the walls of a ruined tower. El Valle has one main street, a police station, and an open-air market that offers, in addition to the usual hats and embroidery, what must be the world's largest selection of golden-frog figurines. There are golden frogs sitting on leaves and—more difficult to understand—golden frogs holding cell phones. There are golden frogs wearing frilly skirts, and golden frogs striking dance poses, and ashtrays featuring golden frogs smoking cigarettes through a holder, after the fashion of F.D.R. The golden frog, which is bright yellow with dark-brown splotches, is endemic to the area around El Valle. It is considered a lucky symbol in Panama—its image is often printed on lottery tickets—though it could just as easily serve as an emblem of disaster.

In the early nineteen-nineties, an American graduate student named Karen Lips established a research site about two hundred miles west of El Valle, in the Talamanca Mountains, just over the border in Costa Rica. Lips was planning to study the local frogs, some of which, she later discovered, had never been identified. In order to get to the site, she had to drive two hours from the nearest town—the last part of the trip required tire chains—and then hike for an hour through the rain forest.

Lips spent two years living in the mountains. "It was a wonderland," she recalled recently. Once she had collected enough data, she left to work on her dissertation. She returned a few months later, and though nothing seemed to have changed, she could hardly find any frogs. Lips couldn't figure out what was happening. She collected all the dead frogs that she came across—there were only a half dozen or so—and sent their bodies to a veterinary pathologist in the United States. The pathologist was also baffled: the specimens, she told Lips, showed no signs of any known disease.

A few years went by. Lips finished her dissertation and got a teaching job. Since the frogs at her old site had pretty much disappeared, she decided that she needed to find a new location to do research. She picked another isolated spot in the rain forest, this time in western Panama. Initially, the frogs there seemed healthy. But, before long, Lips began to find corpses lying in the streams and moribund animals sitting on the banks. Sometimes she would pick up a frog and it would die in her hands. She sent some specimens to a second pathologist in the U.S., and, once again, the pathologist had no idea what was wrong.

Whatever was killing Lips's frogs continued to move, like a wave, east across Panama. By 2002, most frogs in the streams around Santa Fé, a town in the province of Veraguas, had been wiped out. By 2004, the frogs in the national park of El Copé, in the province of Coclé, had all but disappeared. At that point, golden frogs were still relatively common around El Valle; a creek not far from the town was nicknamed Thousand Frog Stream. Then, in 2006, the wave hit.

Of the many species that have existed on earth—estimates run as high as fifty billion—more than ninety-nine per cent have disappeared. In the light of this, it is sometimes joked that all of life today amounts to little more than a rounding error.

Records of the missing can be found everywhere in the world, often in forms that are difficult to overlook. And yet extinction has been a much contested concept. Throughout the eighteenth century, even as extraordinary fossils were being unearthed and put on exhibit, the prevailing view was that species were fixed, created by God for all eternity. If the bones of a strange creature were found, it must mean that that creature was out there somewhere.

"Such is the economy of nature," Thomas Jefferson wrote, "that no instance can be produced, of her having permitted any one race of her animals to become extinct; of her having formed any link in her great work so weak as to be broken." When, as President, he dispatched Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to the Northwest, Jefferson hoped that they would come upon live mastodons roaming the region.

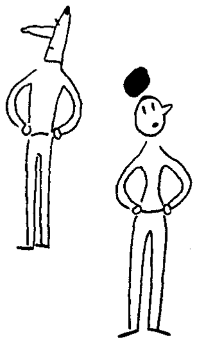
The French naturalist Georges Cuvier was more skeptical. In 1812, he published an essay on the "Revolutions on the Surface of the Globe," in which he asked, "How can we believe that the immense mastodons, the gigantic megatheriums, whose bones have been found in the earth in the two Americas, still live on this continent?" Cuvier had conducted studies of the fossils found in gypsum mines in Paris, and was convinced that many organisms once common to the area no longer existed. These he referred to as *espèces perdues*, or lost species. Cuvier had no way of knowing how much time had elapsed in forming the fossil record. But, as the record indicated that Paris had, at various points, been under water, he concluded that the *espèces perdues* had been swept away by sudden cataclysms.

"Life on this earth has often been disturbed by dreadful events," he wrote. "Innumerable living creatures have been victims of these catastrophes." Cuvier's essay was translated into English in 1813 and published with an introduc-

Some estimates suggest that, if current trends continue, half the world's species may disappear by the end of this century.

tion by the Scottish naturalist Robert Jameson, who interpreted it as proof of Noah's flood. It went through five editions in English and six in French before Cuvier's death, in 1832.

Charles Darwin was well acquainted with Cuvier's ideas and the theological spin they had been given. (He had studied natural history with Jameson at the University of Edinburgh.) In his theory of natural selection, Darwin embraced extinction; it was, he realized, essential that some species should die out as new ones were created. But he believed that this happened only slowly. Indeed, he claimed that it took place more gradually even than speciation: "The complete extinction of the species of a group is generally a slower process than their production." In "On the Origin of Species," published in the fall of 1859, Darwin heaped scorn on the catastrophist approach:



> So profound is our ignorance, and so high our presumption, that we marvel when we hear of the extinction of an organic being; and as we do not see the cause, we invoke cataclysms to desolate the world.

By the start of the twentieth century, this view had become dominant, and to be a scientist meant to see extinction as Darwin did. But Darwin, it turns out, was wrong.

Over the past half-billion years, there have been at least twenty mass extinctions, when the diversity of life on earth has suddenly and dramatically contracted. Five of these—the so-called Big Five—were so devastating that they are usually put in their own category. The first took place during the late Ordovician period, nearly four hundred and fifty million years ago, when life was still confined mainly to water. Geological records indicate that more than eighty per cent of marine species died out. The fifth occurred at the end of the Cretaceous period, sixty-five million years ago. The end-Cretaceous event exterminated not just the dinosaurs but seventy-five per cent of all species on earth.

The significance of mass extinctions goes beyond the sheer number of organisms involved. In contrast to ordinary, or so-called background, extinctions, which claim species that, for one reason or another, have become unfit, mass extinctions strike down the fit and the unfit at once. For example, brachiopods, which look like clams but have an entirely different anatomy, dominated the ocean floor for hundreds of millions of years. In the third of the Big Five extinctions—the end-Permian—the hugely successful brachiopods were nearly wiped out, along with trilobites, blastoids, and eurypterids. (In the end-Permian event, more than ninety per cent of marine species and seventy per cent of terrestrial species vanished; the event is sometimes referred to as "the mother of mass extinctions" or "the great dying.")

Once a mass extinction occurs, it takes millions of years for life to recover, and when it does it generally has a new cast of characters; following the end-Cretaceous event, mammals rose up (or crept out) to replace the departed dinosaurs. In this way, mass extinctions, though missing from the original theory of evolution, have played a determining role in evolution's course; as Richard Leakey has put it, such events "restructure the biosphere" and so "create the pattern of life." It is now generally agreed among biologists that another mass extinction is under way. Though it's difficult to put a precise figure on the losses, it is estimated that, if current trends continue, by the end of this century as many as half of earth's species will be gone.

The El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center, known by the acronym EVACC (pronounced "e-vac"), is a short walk from the market where the golden-frog figurines are sold. It consists of a single building about the size of an average suburban house. The place is filled, floor to ceiling, with tanks. There are tall tanks for species that, like the Rabb's fringe-limbed tree frog, live in the forest canopy, and short tanks for species that, like the big-headed robber frog, live on the forest floor. Tanks of horned marsupial frogs, which carry their eggs in a pouch, sit next to tanks of casque-headed frogs, which carry their eggs on their backs.

The director of EVACC is a herpetologist named Edgardo Griffith. Griffith is tall and broad-shouldered, with a round face and a wide smile. He wears a silver ring in each ear and has a large tattoo of a toad's skeleton on his left shin. Griffith grew up in Panama City, and fell in love with amphibians one day in college when a friend invited him to go frog hunting. He collected most of the frogs at EVACC—there are nearly six hundred—in a rush, just as corpses were beginning to show up around El Valle. At that point, the center was little more than a hole in the ground, and so the frogs had to spend several months in temporary tanks at a local hotel. "We got a very good rate," Griffith assured me. While the amphibians were living in rented rooms, Griffith and his wife, a former Peace Corps volunteer, would go out into a nearby field to catch crickets for their dinner. Now EVACC raises bugs for the frogs in what looks like an oversized rabbit hutch.

EVACC is financed largely by the Houston Zoo, which initially pledged twenty thousand dollars to the project and has ended up spending ten times that amount. The tiny center, though, is not an outpost of the zoo. It might be thought of as a preserve, except that, instead of protecting the amphibians in their natural habitat, the center's aim is to isolate them from it. In this way, EVACC represents an ark built for a modern-day deluge. Its goal is to maintain twenty-five males and twenty-five females of each species—just enough for a breeding population.

The first time I visited, Griffith pointed out various tanks containing frogs that have essentially disappeared from the wild. These include the Panamanian golden frog, which, in addition to its extraordinary coloring, is known for its unusual method of communication; the frogs signal to one another using a kind of semaphore. Griffith said that he expected between a third and a half of all Panama's amphibians to be gone within the next five years. Some species, he said, will probably vanish without anyone's realizing it: "Unfortunately, we are losing all these amphibians before we even know that they exist."

Griffith still goes out collecting for EVACC. Since there are hardly any frogs to be found around El Valle, he has to travel farther afield, across the Panama Canal, to the eastern half of the country.

One day this winter, I set out with him on one of his expeditions, along with two American zookeepers who were also visiting EVACC. The four of us spent a night in a town called Cerro Azul and, at dawn the next morning, drove in a truck to the ranger station at the entrance to Chagres National Park. Griffith was hoping to find females of two species that EVACC is short of. He pulled out his collecting permit and presented it to the sleepy officials manning the station. Some underfed dogs came out to sniff around.

Beyond the ranger station, the road turned into a series of craters connected by ruts. Griffith put Jimi Hendrix on the truck's CD player, and we bounced along to the throbbing beat. (When the driving got particularly gruesome, he would turn down the volume.) Frog collecting requires a lot of supplies, so Griffith had hired two men to help with the carrying. At the very last cluster of houses, in the village of Los Ángeles, they materialized out of the mist. We bounced on until the truck couldn't go any farther; then we all got out and started walking.

The trail wound its way through the rain forest in a slather of red mud. Every few hundred yards, the main path was crossed by a narrower one; these paths had been made by leaf-cutter ants, making millions—perhaps billions—of trips to bring bits of greenery back to their colonies. (The colonies, which look like mounds of sawdust, can cover an area the size of a suburban back yard.) One of the Americans, Chris Bednarski, from the Houston Zoo, warned me to avoid the soldier ants, which will leave their jaws in your shin even after they're dead. "Those'll really mess you up," he observed. The other American, John Chastain, from the Toledo Zoo, was carrying a long hook, for use against venomous snakes. "Fortunately, the ones that can really mess you up are pretty rare," Bednarski said. Howler monkeys screamed in the distance. Someone pointed out jaguar prints in the soft ground.

After about five hours, we emerged into a small clearing. While we were setting up camp, a blue morpho butterfly flitted by, its wings the color of the sky.

That evening, after the sun set, we strapped on headlamps and clambered down to a nearby stream. Many amphibians are nocturnal, and the only way to see them is to go looking in the dark, an exercise that's as tricky as it sounds. I kept slipping, and violating Rule No. 1 of rain-forest safety: never grab onto something if you don't know what it is. After one of my falls, Bednarski showed me a tarantula the size of my fist that he had found on a nearby tree.

One technique for finding amphibians at night is to shine a light into the forest and look for the reflecting glow of their eyes. The first amphibian sighted this way was a San José Cochran frog, perched on top of a leaf. San José Cochran frogs are part of a larger family known as "glass frogs," so named because their translucent skin reveals the outline of their internal organs. This particular glass frog was green, with tiny yellow dots. Griffith pulled a pair of surgical gloves out of his pack. He stood entirely still and then, with a heronlike gesture, darted to scoop up the frog. With his free hand, he took what looked like the end of a Q-tip and swabbed the frog's belly. Finally, he put the Q-tip in a little plastic vial, placed the frog back on the leaf, and pulled out his camera. The frog stared into the lens impassively.

We continued to grope through the blackness. Someone spotted a La Loma robber frog, which is an orangey-red, like the forest floor; someone else spotted a Warzewitsch frog, which is bright green and shaped like a leaf. With every frog, Griffith went through the same routine—snatching it up, swabbing its belly, photographing it. Finally, we came upon a pair of Panamanian robber frogs locked in amplexus—the amphibian version of sex. Griffith left these two alone.

One of the frogs that Griffith was hoping to catch, the horned marsupial frog, has a distinctive call that's been likened to the sound of a champagne bottle being uncorked. As we sloshed along, the call seemed to be emanating from several directions at once. Sometimes it sounded as if it were right nearby, but then, as we approached, it would fall silent. Griffith began imitating the call, making a cork-popping sound with his lips. Eventually, he decided that the rest of us were scaring the frogs with our splashing. He waded ahead, while we stood in the middle of the stream, try-

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ing not to move. When Griffith gestured us over, we found him standing in front of a large yellow frog with long toes and an owlish face. It was sitting on a tree limb, just above eye level. Griffith grabbed the frog and turned it over. Where a female marsupial frog would have a pouch, this one had none. Griffith swabbed it, photographed it, and put it back in the tree.

"You are a beautiful boy," he told the frog.

Amphibians are among the planet's great survivors. The ancestors of today's frogs and toads crawled out of the water some four hundred million years ago, and by two hundred and fifty million years ago the earliest representatives of what became the modern amphibian clades—one includes frogs and toads, a second newts and salamanders—had evolved. This means that amphibians have been around not just longer than mammals, say, or birds; they have been around since before there were dinosaurs. Most amphibians—the word comes from the Greek meaning "double life"—are still closely tied to the aquatic realm from which they emerged. (The ancient Egyptians thought that frogs were produced by the coupling of land and water during the annual flooding of the Nile.) Their eggs, which have no shells, must be kept moist in order to develop. There are frogs that lay their eggs in streams, frogs that lay them in temporary pools, frogs that lay them underground, and frogs that lay them in nests that they construct out of foam. In addition to frogs that carry their eggs on their backs and in pouches, there are frogs that carry them in their vocal sacs, and, until recently, at least, there were frogs that carried their eggs in their stomachs and gave birth through their mouths. Amphibians emerged at a time when all the land on earth was part of one large mass; they have since adapted to conditions on every continent except Antarctica. Worldwide, more than six thousand species have been identified, and while the greatest number are found in the tropical rain forests, there are amphibians that, like the sandhill frog of Australia, can live in the desert, and also amphibians that, like the wood frog, can live above the Arctic Circle. Several common North American frogs, including spring peepers, are able to survive the winter frozen solid.

When, about two decades ago, researchers first noticed that something odd was happening to amphibians, the evidence didn't seem to make sense. David Wake is a biologist at the University of California at Berkeley. In the early nineteen-eighties, his students began returning from frog-collecting trips in the Sierra Nevadas empty-handed. Wake remembered from his own student days that frogs in the Sierras had been difficult to avoid. "You'd be walking through meadows, and you'd inadvertently step on them," he told me. "They were just everywhere." Wake assumed that his students were going to the wrong spots, or that they just didn't know how to look. Then a postdoc with several years of experience collecting amphibians told him that he couldn't find any, either. "I said, 'O.K., I'll go up with you and we'll go out to some proven places,' " Wake recalled. "And I took him out to this proven place and we found, like, two toads."

"I've finally learned not to measure my worth by how many employees I have."

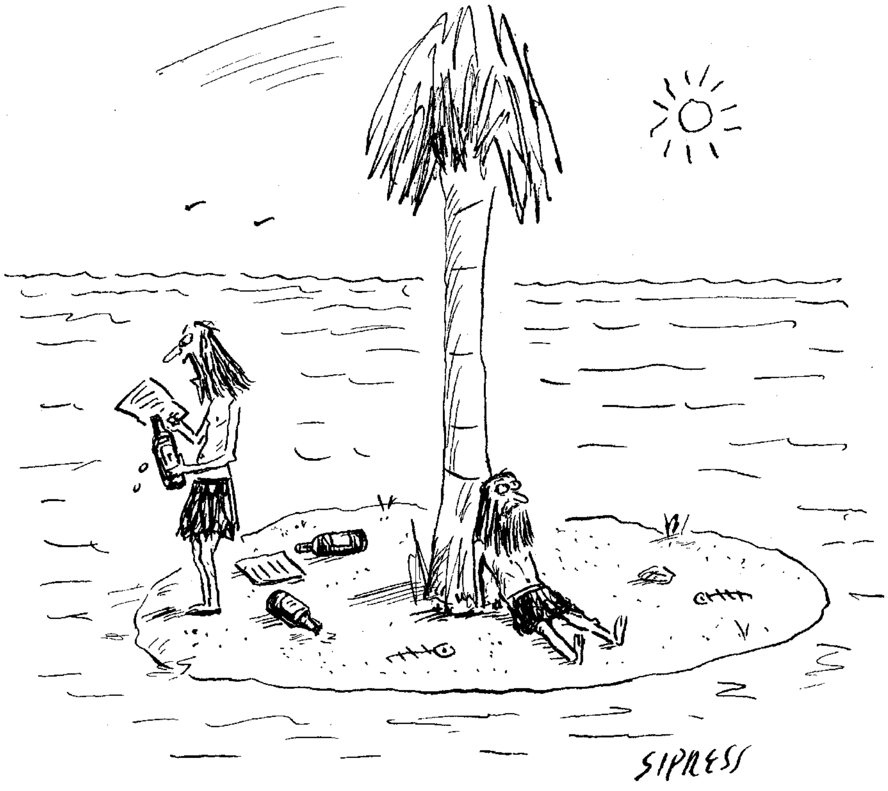
Around the same time, other researchers, in other parts of the world, reported similar difficulties. In the late nineteen-eighties, a herpetologist named Marty Crump went to Costa Rica to study golden toads; she was forced to change her project because, from one year to the next, the toad essentially vanished. (The golden toad, now regarded as extinct, was actually orange; it is not to be confused with the Panamanian golden frog, which is technically also a toad.) Probably simultaneously, in central Costa Rica the populations of twenty species of frogs and toads suddenly crashed. In Ecuador, the jambato toad, a familiar visitor to back-yard gardens, disappeared in a matter of years. And in northeastern Australia biologists noticed that more than a dozen amphibian species, including the southern day frog, one of the more common in the region, were experiencing drastic declines.

But, as the number of examples increased, the evidence only seemed to grow more confounding. Though amphibians in some remote and—relatively speaking—pristine spots seemed to be collapsing, those in other, more obviously disturbed habitats seemed to be doing fine. Meanwhile, in many parts of the world there weren't good data on amphibian populations to begin with, so it was hard to determine what represented terminal descent and what might be just a temporary dip.

"It was very controversial to say that amphibians were disappearing," Andrew Blaustein, a zoology professor at Oregon State University, recalls. Blaustein, who was studying the mating behavior of frogs and toads in the Cascade Mountains, had observed that some long-standing populations simply weren't there anymore. "The debate was whether or not there really was an amphibian population problem, because some people were saying it was just natural variation." At the point that Karen Lips went to look for her first research site, she purposefully tried to steer clear of the controversy.

"I didn't want to work on amphibian decline," she told me. "There were endless debates about whether this was a function of randomness or a true pattern. And the last thing you want to do is get involved when you don't know what's going on."

But the debate was not to be avoided. Even amphibians that had never seen a pond or a forest started dying. Blue poison-dart frogs, which are native to Suriname, had been raised at the National Zoo, in Washington, D.C., for several generations. Then, suddenly, the zoo's tank-bred frogs were nearly wiped out.



"I wish they'd quit sending my financial statements."

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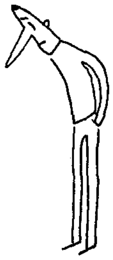
It is difficult to say when, exactly, the current extinction event—sometimes called the sixth extinction—began. What might be thought of as its opening phase appears to have started about fifty thousand years ago. At that time, Australia was home to a fantastic assortment of enormous animals; these included a wombatlike creature the size of a hippo, a land tortoise nearly as big as a VW Beetle, and the giant short-faced kangaroo, which grew to be ten feet tall. Then all of the continent's largest animals disappeared. Every species of marsupial weighing more than two hundred pounds—there were nineteen of them—vanished, as did three species of giant reptiles and a flightless bird with stumpy legs known as *Genyornis newtoni.*

This die-off roughly coincided with the arrival of the first people on the continent, probably from Southeast Asia. Australia is a big place, and there couldn't have been very many early settlers. For a long time, the coincidence was discounted. Yet, thanks to recent work by geologists and paleontologists, a clear global pattern has emerged. About eleven thousand years ago, three-quarters of North America's largest animals—among them mastodons, mammoths, giant beavers, short-faced bears, and sabre-toothed tigers—began to go extinct. This is right around the time the first humans are believed to have wandered onto the continent across the Bering land bridge. In relatively short order, the first humans settled South America as well. Subsequently, more than thirty species of South American "megamammals," including elephant-size ground sloths and rhino-like creatures known as toxodons, died out.

And what goes for Australia and the Americas also goes for many other parts of the world. Humans settled Madagascar around two thousand years ago; the island subsequently lost all mammals weighing more than twenty pounds, including pygmy hippos and giant lemurs. "Substantial losses have occurred throughout near time," Ross MacPhee, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, and an expert on extinctions of the recent geological past, has written. "In the majority of cases, these losses occurred when, and only when, people began to expand across areas that had never before experienced their presence." The Maori arrived in New Zealand around eight hundred years ago. They encountered eleven species of moas—huge ostrichlike creatures without wings. Within a few centuries—and possibly within a single century—all eleven moa species were gone. While these "first contact" extinctions were most pronounced among large animals, they were not confined to them. Humans discovered the Hawaiian Islands around fifteen hundred years ago; soon afterward, ninety per cent of Hawaii's native bird species disappeared.

"We expect extinction after people arrive on an island," David Steadman, the curator of ornithology at the Florida Museum of Natural History, has written. "Survival is the exception."

Why was first contact with humans so catastrophic? Some of the animals may have been hunted to death; thousands of moa bones have been found at Maori archeological sites, and man-made artifacts have been uncovered near mammoth and mastodon remains at more than a dozen sites in North America. Hunting, however, seems insufficient to account for so many losses across so many different taxa in so many parts of the globe. A few years ago, researchers analyzed hundreds of bits of emu and *Genyornis newtoni* eggshell, some dating from long before the first people arrived in Australia and some from after. They found that around forty-five thousand years ago, rather abruptly, emus went from eating all sorts of plants to relying mainly on shrubs. The researchers hypothesized that Australia's early settlers periodically set the countryside on fire—perhaps to flush out prey—a practice that would have reduced the variety of plant life. Those animals which, like emus, could cope with a changed landscape survived, while those which, like *Genyornis*, could not died out.

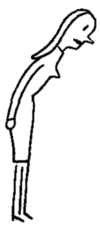


When Australia was first settled, there were maybe half a million people on earth. There are now more than six and a half billion, and it is expected that within the next three years the number will reach seven billion.

Human impacts on the planet have increased proportionately. Farming, logging, and building have transformed between a third and a half of the world's land surface, and even these figures probably understate the effect, since land not being actively exploited may still be fragmented. Most of the world's major waterways have been diverted or dammed or otherwise manipulated—in the United States, only two per cent of rivers run unimpeded—and people now use half the world's readily accessible freshwater runoff. Chemical plants fix more atmospheric nitrogen than all natural terrestrial processes combined, and fisheries remove more than a third of the primary production of the temperate coastal waters of the oceans. Through global trade and international travel, humans have transported countless species into ecosystems that are not prepared for them. We have pumped enough carbon dioxide into the air to alter the climate and to change the chemistry of the oceans.

Amphibians are affected by many—perhaps most—of these disruptions. Habitat destruction is a major factor in their decline, and agricultural chemicals seem to be causing a rash of frog deformities. But the main culprit in the wavelike series of crashes, it's now believed, is a fungus. Ironically, this fungus, which belongs to a group known as chytrids (pronounced "kit-rids"), appears to have been spread by doctors.

Chytrid fungi are older even than amphibians—the first species evolved more than six hundred million years ago—and even more widespread. In a manner of speaking, they can be found—they are microscopic—just about everywhere, from the tops of trees to deep underground. Generally, chytrid fungi feed off dead plants; there are also species that live on algae, species that live on roots, and species that live in the guts of cows, where they help break down cellulose. Until two pathologists, Don Nichols and Allan Pessier, identified a weird microorganism growing on dead frogs from the National Zoo, chytrids had never been known to attack vertebrates. Indeed, the new chytrid was so unusual that an entire genus had to be created to accommodate it. It was named *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*—*batrachos* is Greek for "frog"—or Bd for short.



Nichols and Pessier sent samples from the infected frogs to a mycologist at the University of Maine, Joyce Longcore, who managed to culture the Bd fungus. They then exposed healthy blue poison-dart frogs to it. Within three weeks, the animals sickened and died.

The discovery of Bd explained many of the data that had previously seemed so puzzling. Chytrid fungi generate microscopic spores that disperse in water; these could have been carried along by streams, or in the runoff after a rainstorm, producing what in Central America showed up as an eastward-moving scourge. In the case of zoos, the spores could have been brought in on other frogs or on tracked-in soil. Bd seemed to be able to live on just about any frog or toad, but not all amphibians are as susceptible to it, which would account for why some populations succumbed while others appeared to be unaffected.

Rick Speare is an Australian pathologist who identified Bd right around the same time that the National Zoo team did. From the pattern of decline, Speare suspected that Bd had been spread by an amphibian that had been moved around the globe. One of the few species that met this condition was *Xenopus laevis*, commonly known as the African clawed frog. In the early nineteen-thirties, a British zoologist named Lancelot Hogben discovered that female *Xenopus laevis*, when injected with certain types of human hormones, laid eggs. His discovery became the basis for a new kind of pregnancy test and, starting in the late nineteen-thirties, thousands of African clawed frogs were exported out of Cape Town. In the nineteen-forties and fifties, it was not uncommon for obstetricians to keep tanks full of the frogs in their offices.

To test his hypothesis, Speare began collecting samples from live African clawed frogs and also from specimens preserved in museums. He found that specimens dating back to the nineteen-thirties were indeed already carrying the fungus. He also found that live African clawed frogs were widely infected with Bd, but seemed to suffer no ill effects from it. In 2004, he co-authored an influential paper that argued that the transmission route for the fungus began in southern Africa and ran through clinics and hospitals around the world.

"Let's say people were raising African clawed frogs in aquariums, and they just popped the water out," Speare told me. "In most cases when they did that, no frogs got infected, but then, on that hundredth time, one local frog might have been infected. Or people might have said, 'I'm sick of this frog, I'm going to let it go.' And certainly there are populations of African clawed frogs established in a number of countries around the world, to illustrate that that actually did occur."

At this point, Bd appears to be, for all intents and purposes, unstoppable. It can be killed by bleach—Clorox is among the donors to EVACC—but it is impossible to disinfect an entire rain forest. Sometime in the last year or so, the fungus jumped the Panama Canal. (When Edgardo Griffith swabbed the frogs on our trip, he was collecting samples that would eventually be analyzed for it.) It also seems to be heading into Panama from the opposite direction, out of Colombia. It has spread through the highlands of South America, down the eastern coast of Australia, and into New Zealand, and has been detected in Italy, Spain, and France. In the U.S., it appears to have radiated from several points, not so much in a wavelike pattern as in a series of ripples.

In the fossil record, mass extinctions stand out, so sharply that the very language scientists use to describe the earth's history derives from them. In 1840, the British geologist John Phillips divided life into three chapters: the Paleozoic (from the Greek for "ancient life"), the Mesozoic ("middle life"), and the Cenozoic ("new life"). Phillips fixed as the dividing point between the first and second eras what would now be called the end-Permian extinction, and between the second and the third the end-Cretaceous event. The fossils from these eras were so different that Phillips thought they represented three distinct episodes of creation.

Darwin's resistance to catastrophism meant that he couldn't accept what the fossils seemed to be saying. Drawing on the work of the eminent geologist Charles Lyell, a good friend of his, Darwin maintained that the apparent discontinuities in the history of life were really just gaps in the archive. In "On the Origin of Species," he argued:

> With respect to the apparently sudden extermination of whole families or orders, as of Trilobites at the close of the palaeozoic period and of Ammonites at the close of the secondary period, we must remember what has been already said on the probable wide intervals of time between our consecutive formations; and in these intervals there may have been much slow extermination.

All the way into the nineteen-sixties, paleontologists continued to give talks with titles like "The Incompleteness of the Fossil Record." And this view might have persisted even longer had it not been for a remarkable, largely inadvertent discovery made in the following decade.

In the mid-nineteen-seventies, Walter Alvarez, a geologist at the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory, in New York, was studying the earth's polarity. It had recently been learned that the orientation of the planet's magnetic field reverses, so that every so often, in effect, south becomes north and then vice versa. Alvarez and some colleagues had found that a certain formation of pinkish limestone in Italy, known as the *scaglia rossa*, recorded these occasional reversals. The limestone also contained the fossilized remains of millions of tiny sea creatures called foraminifera. In the course of several trips to Italy, Alvarez became interested in a thin layer of clay in the limestone that seemed to have been laid down around the end of the Cretaceous. Below the layer, certain species of foraminifera—or forams, for short—were preserved. In the clay layer there were no forams. Above the layer, the earlier species disappeared and new forams appeared. Having been taught the uniformitarian view, Alvarez wasn't sure what to make of what he was seeing, because the change, he later recalled, certainly "looked very abrupt."

Alvarez decided to try to find out how long it had taken for the clay layer to be deposited. In 1977, he took a post at the University of California at Berkeley, where his father, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Luis Alvarez, was also teaching. The older Alvarez suggested using the element iridium to answer the question.

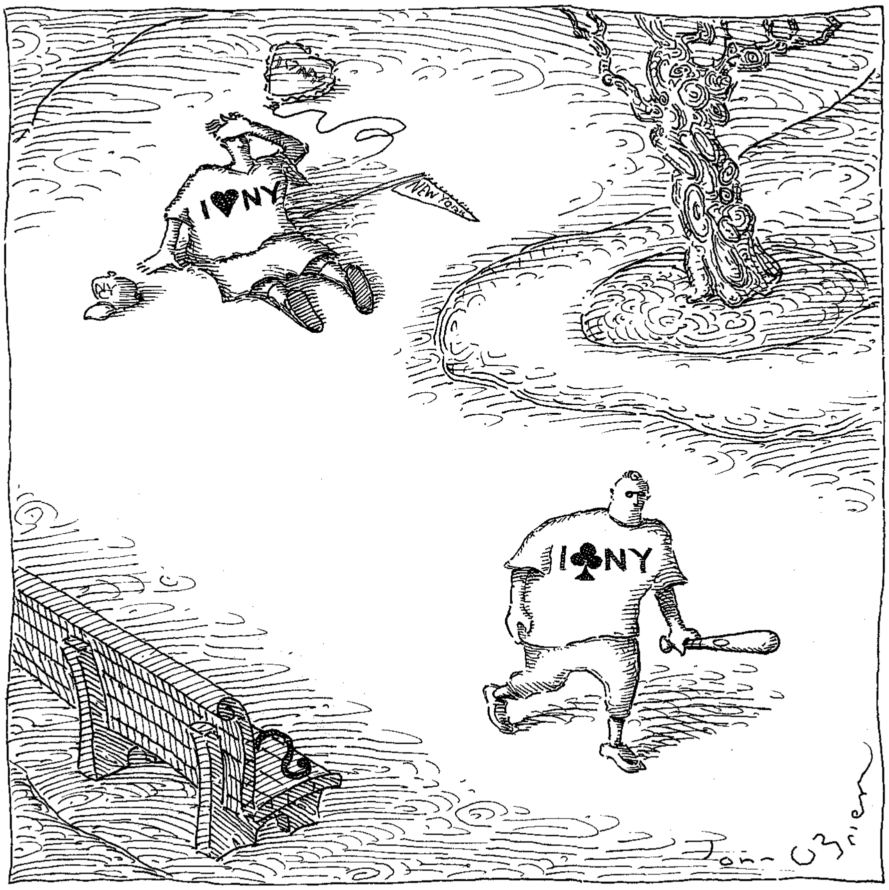
Iridium is extremely rare on the surface of the earth, but more plentiful in meteorites, which, in the form of microscopic grains of cosmic dust, are constantly raining down on the planet. The Alvarezes reasoned that, if the clay layer had taken a significant amount of time to deposit, it would contain detectable levels of iridium, and if it had been deposited in a short time it wouldn't. They enlisted two other scientists, Frank Asaro and Helen Michel, to run the tests, and gave them samples of the clay. Nine months later, they got a phone call. There was something seriously wrong. Much too much iridium was showing up in the samples. Walter Alvarez flew to Denmark to take samples of another layer of exposed clay from the end of the Cretaceous. When they were tested, these samples, too, were way out of line.

The Alvarez hypothesis, as it became known, was that everything—the clay layer from the *scaglia rossa*, the clay from Denmark, the spike in iridium, the shift in the fossils—could be explained by a single event. In 1980, the Alvarezes and their colleagues proposed that a six-mile-wide asteroid had slammed into the earth, killing off not only the forams but the dinosaurs and all the other organisms that went extinct at the end of the Cretaceous. "I can remember working very hard to make that 1980 paper just as solid as it could possibly be," Walter Alvarez recalled recently. Nevertheless, the idea was greeted with incredulity.

"The arrogance of those people is simply unbelievable," one paleontologist told the *Times*.

"Unseen bolides dropping into an unseen sea are not for me," another declared.

Over the next decade, evidence in favor of an enormous impact kept accumulating. Geologists looking at rocks from the end of the Cretaceous in Mon-



tana found tiny mineral grains that seemed to have suffered a violent shock. (Such "shocked quartz" is typically found in the immediate vicinity of meteorite craters.) Other geologists, looking in other parts of the world, found small, glasslike spheres of the sort believed to form when molten-rock droplets splash up into the atmosphere. In 1990, a crater large enough to have been formed by the enormous asteroid that the Alvarezes were proposing was found, buried underneath the Yucatán. In 1991, that crater was dated, and discovered to have been formed at precisely the time the dinosaurs died off.

"Those eleven years seemed long at the time, but looking back they seem very brief," Walter Alvarez told me. "Just think about it for a moment. Here you have a challenge to a uniformitarian viewpoint that basically every geologist and paleontologist had been trained in, as had their professors and their professors' professors, all the way back to Lyell. And what you saw was people looking at the evidence. And they gradually did come to change their minds."

Today, it's generally accepted that the asteroid that plowed into the Yucatán led, in very short order, to a mass extinction, but scientists are still uncertain exactly how the process unfolded. One theory holds that the impact raised a cloud of dust that blocked the sun, preventing photosynthesis and causing widespread starvation. According to another theory, the impact kicked up a plume of vaporized rock travelling with so much force that it broke through the atmosphere. The particles in the plume then recondensed, generating, as they fell back to earth, enough thermal energy to, in effect, broil the surface of the planet.

Whatever the mechanism, the Alvarezes' discovery wreaked havoc with the uniformitarian idea of extinction. The fossil record, it turned out, was marked by discontinuities because the history of life was marked by discontinuities.

In the nineteenth century, and then again during the Second World War, the Adirondacks were a major source of iron ore. As a result, the mountains are now riddled with abandoned mines. On a gray day this winter, I went to visit one of the mines (I was asked not to say which) with a wildlife biologist named Al Hicks. Hicks, who is fifty-four, is tall and outgoing, with a barrel chest and ruddy cheeks. He works at the headquarters of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, in Albany, and we met in a parking lot not far from his office. From there, we drove almost due north.

Along the way, Hicks explained how, in early 2007, he started to get a lot of strange calls about bats. Sometimes the call would be about a dead bat that had been brought inside by somebody's dog. Sometimes it was about a live—or half-alive—bat flapping around on the driveway. This was in the middle of winter, when any bat in the Northeast should have been hanging by its feet in a state of torpor. Hicks found the calls bizarre, but, beyond that, he didn't know what to make of them. Then, in March, 2007, some colleagues went to do a routine census of hibernating bats in a cave west of Albany. After the survey, they, too, phoned in.

"They said, 'Holy shit, there's dead bats everywhere,' " Hicks recalled. He instructed them to bring some carcasses back to the office, which they did. They also shot photographs of live bats hanging from the cave's ceiling. When Hicks examined the photographs, he saw that the animals looked as if they had been dunked, nose first, in talcum powder. This was something he had never run across before, and he began sending the photographs to all the bat specialists he could think of. None of them could explain it, either.

"We were thinking, Oh, boy, we hope this just goes away," he told me. "It was like the Bush Administration. And, like the Bush Administration, it just wouldn't go away." In the winter of 2008, bats with the white powdery substance were found in thirty-three hibernating spots. Meanwhile, bats kept dying. In some hibernacula, populations plunged by as much as ninety-seven per cent.

1934

You might hear that after dark in towns
like Detroit packs of wild dogs took over
the streets. I was there. It never happened.
In the old country before the Great War,
my people were merchants and butchers,
and then the killings drove the family
first to England, then Canada, then here.
My father's brother had a shoe repair shop
for a time on Brush Street; he'd learned
the trade from his father back in Kiev.
My mother's family was in junk. The men
were huge, thick chested, with long arms
and great scarred hands. My uncle Leo
could embrace a barrel of scrap metal,
laugh out his huge laugh, and lift it up
just for the joy. His wife, Rebecca,
let her hair grow out in great wiry tangles
and carried her little fists like hammers.
Late summer Sundays we'd drive out
to the country and pick armloads
of sweet corn, boil them in sugar,
and eat and eat until we couldn't.
Can you believe those people would let
dogs take what was theirs, would cross
an ocean and a continent to let
anyone or anything dictate?
After dark these same men would drink
out on the front steps. The neighbors claimed
they howled at the moon. Another lie.
Sometimes they told stories of life

back in Russia, stories I half-believed,
of magic escapes and revenge killings,
of the gorgeous Ukrainian girls they had.
One night they tore up the lawn wrestling, until
Leo triumphed, Leo in his vested suit,
gray and sweat-stained. My uncle Josef
was different; tall and slender, he'd
come into the family through marriage
here in Michigan. A pensive, gentle man,
when stray dogs came to the back door
of the shoe shop he'd let them in, even
feed them. Their owners, he told me,
barely had enough to feed themselves.
Uncle Josef would take a battered pair
of work shoes and cut the soles off
with a hooked cobbler's knife and then,
drawing one nail at a time from his mouth,
pound on a new sole. He'd pry off
the heel and do the same. I was just a kid,
seven at most, and never tired of watching
how at the polishing wheel the leather
took on its color and began to glow.
Once he made a knife for me, complete
with a little scabbard that looped
around my belt. The black handle, too,
was leather, taken from a boot no one
reclaimed. He pounded and shaped it
until it felt like stone. Whenever you're
scared, he told me, just rub the handle
three times and nothing bad can happen.

—*Philip Levine*

That winter, officials at the National Wildlife Health Center, in Madison, Wisconsin, began to look into the situation. They were able to culture the white substance, which was found to be a never before identified fungus that grows only at cold temperatures. The condition became known as white-nose syndrome, or W.N.S. White nose seemed to be spreading fast; by March, 2008, it had been found on bats in three more states—Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—and the mortality rate was running above seventy-five per cent. This past winter, white nose was found to have spread to bats in five more states: New Jersey, New Hampshire, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

In a paper published recently in *Science*, Hicks and several co-authors observed that "parallels can be drawn between the threat posed by W.N.S. and that from chytridiomycosis, a lethal fungal skin infection that has recently caused precipitous global amphibian population declines."

When we arrived at the base of a mountain not far from Lake Champlain, more than a dozen people were standing around in the cold, waiting for us. Most, like Hicks, were from the D.E.C., and had come to help conduct a bat census. In addition, there was a pair of biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a local novelist who was thinking of incorporating a subplot about white nose into his next book. Everyone put on snowshoes, except for the novelist, who hadn't brought any, and began tromping up the slope toward the mine entrance.

The snow was icy and the going slow, so it took almost half an hour to reach an outlook over the Champlain Valley. While we were waiting for the novelist to catch up—apparently, he was having trouble hiking through the three-foot-deep drifts—the conversation turned to the potential dangers of entering an abandoned mine. These, I was told, included getting crushed by falling rocks, being poisoned by a gas leak, and plunging over a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more.

After another fifteen minutes or so, we reached the mine entrance—essentially, a large hole cut into the hillside. The stones in front of the entrance were white with bird droppings, and the snow was covered with paw prints. Evidently, ravens and coyotes had discovered that the spot was an easy place to pick up dinner.

"Well, shit," Hicks said. Bats were fluttering in and out of the mine, and in some cases crawling on the ground. Hicks went to catch one; it was so lethargic that he grabbed it on the first try. He held it between his thumb and forefinger, snapped its neck, and placed it in a ziplock bag.

"Short survey today," he announced.

At this point, it's not known exactly how the syndrome kills bats. What is known is that bats with the syndrome often wake up from their torpor and fly around, which leads them to die either of starvation or of the cold or to get picked off by predators.

We unstrapped our snowshoes and put on helmets. Hicks handed out headlamps—we were supposed to carry at least one extra—and packages of batteries; then we filed into the mine, down a long, sloping tunnel. Shattered beams littered the ground, and bats flew up at us through the gloom. Hicks cautioned everyone to stay alert. "There's places that if you take a step you won't be stepping back," he warned. The tunnel twisted along, sometimes opening up into concert-hall-size chambers with side tunnels leading out of them.

Over the years, the various sections of the mine had acquired names; when we reached something called the Don Thomas section, we split up into groups to start the survey. The process consisted of photographing as many bats as possible. (Later on, back in Albany, someone would have to count all the bats in the pictures.) I went with Hicks, who was carrying an enormous camera, and one of the biologists from the Fish and Wildlife Service, who had a laser pointer. The biologist would aim the pointer at a cluster of bats hanging from the ceiling. Hicks would then snap a photograph. Most of the bats were little brown bats; these are the most common

LES NOUVEAUX PAUVRES
NOT GOING AWAY THIS SUMMER
DIDN'T BUY THOSE BOOTS
IN THE "POOR" MIND-SET
R. Chast

bats in the U.S. and the ones you are most likely to see flying around on a summer night. There were also Indiana bats, which are on the federal endangered-species list, and small-footed bats, which, at the rate things are going, are likely to end up there. As we moved along, we kept disturbing the bats, which squeaked and started to rustle around, like half-asleep children.

Since white nose grows only in the cold, it's odd to find it living on mammals, which, except when they're hibernating (or dead), maintain a high body temperature. It has been hypothesized that the fungus normally subsists by breaking down organic matter in a chilly place, and that it was transported into bat hibernacula, where it began to break down bats. When news of white nose began to get around, a spelunker sent Hicks photographs that he had shot in Howe's Cave, in central New York. The photographs, which had been taken in 2006, showed bats with clear signs of white nose and are the earliest known record of the syndrome. Howe's Cave is connected to Howe's Caverns, a popular tourist destination.

"It's kind of interesting that the first record we have of this fungus is photographs from a commercial cave in New York that gets about two hundred thousand visits a year," Hicks told me.

Despite the name, white nose is not confined to bats' noses; as we worked our way along, people kept finding bats with freckles of fungus on their wings and ears. Several of these were dispatched, for study purposes, with a thumb and forefinger. Each dead bat was sexed—males can be identified by their tiny penises—and placed in a ziplock bag.

At about 7 P.M., we came to a huge, rusty winch, which, when the mine was operational, had been used to haul ore to the surface. By this point, we were almost down at the bottom of the mountain, except that we were on the inside of it. Below, the path disappeared into a pool of water, like the River Styx. It was impossible to go any further, and we began working our way back up.

Bats, like virtually all other creatures alive today, are masters of adaptation descended from lucky survivors. The earliest bat fossil that has been found dates from fifty-three million years ago, which is to say twelve million years after the impact that ended the Cretaceous. It belongs to an animal that had wings and could fly but had not yet developed the specialized inner ear that, in modern bats, allows for echolocation. Worldwide, there are now more than a thousand bat species, which together make up nearly a fifth of all species of mammals. Most feed on insects; there are also bats that live off fruit, bats that eat fish—they use echolocation to detect minute ripples in the water—and a small but highly celebrated group that consumes blood. Bats are great colonizers—Darwin noted that even New Zealand, which has no other native mammals, has its own bats—and they can be found as far north as Alaska and as far south as Tierra del Fuego.

In the time that bats have evolved and spread, the world has changed a great deal. Fifty-three million years ago, at the start of the Eocene, the planet was very warm, and tropical palms grew at the latitude of London. The climate cooled, the Antarctic ice sheet began to form, and, eventually, about two million years ago, a period of recurring glaciations began. As recently as fifteen thousand years ago, the Adirondacks were buried under ice.

One of the puzzles of mass extinction is why, at certain junctures, the resourcefulness of life seems to falter. Powerful as the Alvarez hypothesis proved to be, it explains only a single mass extinction.

"I think that, after the evidence became pretty strong for the impact at the end of the Cretaceous, those of us who were working on this naïvely expected that we would go out and find evidence of impacts coinciding with the other events," Walter Alvarez told me. "And, of course, it's turned out to be much more complicated. We're seeing right now that a mass extinction can be caused by human beings. So it's clear that we do not have a general theory of mass extinction."

Andrew Knoll, a paleontologist at Harvard, has spent most of his career studying the evolution of early life. (Among the many samples he keeps in his office are fossils of microorganisms that lived 2.8 billion years ago.) He has also written about more recent events, like the end-Permian extinction, which took place two hundred and fifty million years ago, and the current extinction event.

Knoll noted that the world can change a lot without producing huge losses; ice ages, for instance, come and go. "What the geological record tells us is that it's time to worry when the rate of change is fast," he told me. In the case of the end-Permian extinction, Knoll and many other researchers believe that the trigger was a sudden burst of volcanic activity; a plume of hot mantle rock from deep in the earth sent nearly a million cubic miles' worth of flood basalts streaming over what is now Siberia. The eruption released enormous quantities of carbon dioxide, which presumably led—then as now—to global warming, and to significant changes in ocean chemistry.

"CO_2 is a paleontologist's dream," Knoll told me. "It can kill things directly, by physiological effects, of which ocean acidification is the best known, and it can kill things by changing the climate. If it gets warmer faster than you can migrate, you're in trouble."

In the end, the most deadly aspect of human activity may simply be the pace of it. Just in the past century, CO_2 levels in the atmosphere have changed by as much—a hundred parts per million—as they normally do in a hundred-thousand-year glacial cycle. Meanwhile, the drop in ocean pH levels that has occurred over the past fifty years may well exceed anything that happened in the seas during the previous fifty million. In a single afternoon, a pathogen like Bd can move, via United or American Airlines, halfway around the world. Before man entered the picture, such a migration would have required hundreds, if not thousands, of years—if, indeed, it could have been completed at all.

Currently, a third of all amphibian species, nearly a third of reef-building corals, a quarter of all mammals, and an eighth of all birds are classified as "threatened with extinction." These estimates do not include the species that humans have already wiped out or the species for which there are insufficient data. Nor do the figures take into account the projected effects of global warming or ocean acidification. Nor, of course, can they anticipate the kinds of sudden, terrible collapses that are becoming almost routine.

I asked Knoll to compare the current situation with past extinction events. He told me that he didn't want to exaggerate recent losses, or to suggest that an extinction on the order of the end-Cretaceous or end-Permian was imminent. At the same time, he noted, when the asteroid hit the Yucatán "it was one terrible afternoon." He went on, "But it was a short-term event, and then things started getting better. Today, it's not like you have a stress and the stress is relieved and recovery starts. It gets bad and then it keeps being bad, because the stress doesn't go away. Because the stress is us."

Aeolus Cave, in Dorset, Vermont, is believed to be the largest bat hibernaculum in New England; it is estimated that, before white nose hit, more than two hundred thousand bats—some from as far away as Ontario and Rhode Island—came to spend the winter there.

In late February, I went with Hicks to visit Aeolus. In the parking lot of the local general store, we met up with officials from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, who had organized the trip. The entrance to Aeolus is about a mile and a half from the nearest road, up a steep, wooded hillside. This time, we approached by snowmobile. The temperature outside was about twenty-five degrees—far too low for bats to be active—but when we got near the entrance we could, once again, see bats fluttering around. The most senior of the Vermont officials, Scott Darling, announced that we'd all have to put on latex gloves and Tyvek suits before proceeding. At first, this seemed to me to be paranoid; soon, however, I came to see the sense of it.

Aeolus is a marble cave that was created by water flow over the course of thousands of years. The entrance is a large, nearly horizontal tunnel at the bottom of a small hollow. To keep people out, the Nature Conservancy, which owns the cave, has blocked off the opening with huge iron slats, so that it looks like the gate of a medieval fortress. With a key, one of the slats can be removed; this creates a narrow gap that can be crawled (or slithered) through. Despite the cold, there was an awful smell emanating from the cave—half game farm, half garbage dump. When it was my turn, I squeezed through the gap and immediately slid on the ice, into a pile of dead bats. The scene, in the dimness, was horrific. There were giant icicles hanging from the ceiling, and from the floor large knobs of ice rose up, like polyps. The ground was covered with dead bats; some of the ice knobs, I noticed, had bats frozen into them. There were torpid bats roosting on the ceiling, and also wide-awake ones, which would take off and fly by or, sometimes, right into us.

Why bat corpses pile up in some places, while in others they get eaten or in some other way disappear, is unclear. Hicks speculated that the weather conditions at Aeolus were so harsh that the bats didn't even make it out of the cave before dropping dead. He and Darling had planned to do a count of the bats in the first chamber of the cave, known as Guano Hall, but this plan was soon abandoned, and it was decided just to collect specimens. Darling explained that the specimens would be going to the American Museum of Natural History, so that there would at least be a record of the bats that had once lived in Aeolus. "This may be one of the last opportunities," he said. In contrast to a mine, which has been around at most for a few centuries, Aeolus, he pointed out, has existed for millennia. It's likely that bats have been hibernating there, generation after generation, since the end of the last ice age.

"That's what makes this so dramatic—it's breaking the evolutionary chain," Darling said.

He and Hicks began picking dead bats off the ground. Those which were too badly decomposed were tossed back; those which were more or less intact were sexed and placed in two-quart plastic bags. I helped out by holding open the bag for females. Soon, it was full and another one was started. It struck me, as I stood there holding a bag filled with several dozen stiff, almost weightless bats, that I was watching mass extinction in action.

Several more bags were collected. When the specimen count hit somewhere around five hundred, Darling decided that it was time to go. Hicks hung back, saying that he wanted to take some pictures. In the hours we had been slipping around the cave, the carnage had grown even more grotesque; many of the dead bats had been crushed and now there was blood oozing out of them. As I made my way up toward the entrance, Hicks called after me: "Don't step on any dead bats." It took me a moment to realize that he was joking. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with Elizabeth Kolbert.

FICTION

AVA'S APARTMENT

BY JONATHAN LETHEM

Perkus Tooth, the wall-eyed former rock critic, awoke the morning after the party he vowed would be his last, the night after the worst blizzard of the winter, asleep on a staircase, already in the grip of a terrific cluster headache. He suffered these regularly, knew the drill, felt himself hunkering into the blinding, energy-sapping migraine by ancient instinct. Nobody greeted him, his hosts asleep themselves, or gone out, so he made his way downstairs, groped to locate his coat in their closet, and then found his way outdoors.

Perkus's shoes were, of course, inadequate for the depth of freshly fallen snow. He'd have walked the eight blocks home in any event—the migraine nausea would have made a cab ride unbearable—but there wasn't any choice. The streets were free of cabs and any other traffic. Some of the larger, better-managed buildings had had their sidewalks laboriously cleared and salted, the snow pushed into mounds covering hydrants and newspaper boxes, but elsewhere Perkus had to climb through drifts that had barely been traversed, fitting his shoes into boot prints that had been punched knee-deep. His pants were quickly soaked, and his sleeves as well, since between semi-blindness and poor footing he stumbled to his hands and knees several times before he even got to Second Avenue. Under other circumstances he'd have been pitied, perhaps offered aid, or possibly arrested for public drunkenness, but on streets the January blizzard had remade there was no one to observe him, apart from a cross-country skier who stared mercilessly from behind solar goggles, and a few dads here and there dragging kids on sleds. If they noticed him at all they probably thought he was out playing, too. There was no reason for someone to be making his way along impassable streets so early the day after. Not a single shop was open, all the entrances buried in drift.

When he met the barricade at the corner of Eighty-fourth, he at first tried to bluster his way past, thinking the cop had misunderstood. But no. His building was one of three the snowstorm had undermined, the weight of the snow threatening the soundness of its foundation. He talked with neighbors he hadn't spoken to in fifteen years of dwelling on the same floor, though gripped in the vise of his cluster headache he barely heard a word they said, and he couldn't have made too good an impression. *You need to find someplace to sleep tonight*—that was a fragment that got through to him. *They might let you in for your stuff later, but not now. You can call this number . . .* but the number he missed. Then, as Perkus teetered away: *Get yourself indoors, young man.* And: *Pity about that one.*

Perkus Tooth had already been at a watershed, wishing to find an exit from himself, from his life and his friends, his tatter of a career—to shed it all like a snakeskin. The city in its twenty-first-century incarnation had no place for him, but it couldn't fire him—he'd quit instead. For so many years he'd lived in his biosphere of an apartment as if it were still 1978 outside, as if placing the occasional review in the *Village Voice* or *New York Rocker* gave him credentials as a citizen of the city, but the long joke of his existence had reached its punch line. The truth was that he'd never thought of himself as a critic to begin with, more a curator. His apartment—bursting with vinyl LPs, forgotten books, binders full of zines, VHS cassettes of black-and-white films taped from PBS and "Million Dollar Movie"—was a cultural cache shored against time's indifference, and Perkus had merely been its caretaker, his sporadic writings the equivalent of a catalogue listing items decidedly *not* for sale.

And his friends? Those among whom he wasted his days—the retired actor, now a fixture on the Upper East Side social scene; the former radical turned cynical mayor's operative; the once aspiring investigative journalist turned hack ghostwriter—had all used up their integrity, accommodated themselves to the simulacrum that Manhattan had become. Perkus had come to an end with them, too. He needed a new life. Now, incredibly, the storm had called his bluff. This was thrilling and terrifying at once: who would he be without his apartment, without that assembly of brunching mediocrities?

There was only one haven. Perkus had one friend who was unlike the others: Biller. (Perkus had never heard a last name. Biller was just Biller.) Homeless in a Manhattan that no longer coddled the homeless, Biller was crafty, a squatter and a survivor, an underground man. Now, as if in a merciful desert vision, the information that Biller had once jotted on a scrap of receipt on Perkus's kitchen table appeared before him: Biller's latest digs, in the Friendreth Apartments, on Sixty-fifth near York. Perkus couldn't remember the numerical address, but he didn't need that; from Biller's descriptions of the odd building and its inhabitants he'd surely be able to find it.

Yes, Biller was the one he needed now. Trudging sickened through the snowdrifts like a Napoleonic soldier in retreat from Moscow, Perkus was adequately convinced. He had got complacent in his Eighty-fourth Street apartment. Time to go off the grid. Biller knew how to do this, even in a place like Manhattan, which was nothing *but* grid. Biller was the essential man. They could compare notes and pool resources, Perkus preferring to think of himself as not yet completely without resources. Perkus laughed at himself now: in his thinking, Biller was becoming like Old Sneelock, in Dr. Seuss's "If I Ran the Circus," the one who'd single-handedly raise the tents, sell the pink lemonade, shovel the elephants' shit, and also do the high-wire aerialist act. In this manner, dismal yet self-amused, Perkus propelled his body to Sixty-fifth Street, despite the headache's dislodging him from himself, working with the only body he had—a shivering, frost-fingered, half-blind stumbler in sweat- and salt-stained party clothes.

He trailed a dog and its walker into the lobby, catching the swinging door before it clicked shut, one last act of mastery of the mechanics of outward existence, and then passed out in a melting pool on the tile just inside. Biller would later explain to Perkus that another dog walker had sought Biller out, knowing that the tall black man in the spotted fur hat functioned as ambassador for the vagabond entities sometimes seen lurking in the building, and that this tatterdemalion in the entranceway was nothing if not one of those. Biller gathered Perkus up and installed him in what he would come to know as Ava's apartment. It was there that Perkus, nursed through the first hours by Biller's methodical and unquestioning attentions, his clothes changed, his brow mopped, his sapped body nourished with a simple cup of ramen and beef broth, felt his new life begin.

Perkus Tooth had twenty-four hours alone in the apartment before Ava arrived. Biller kept close tabs on all the vacancies in the building and assured him that this was the best way, the intended result being that Ava would take him for granted, detect his

EDOUARD BOUBAT/RAPHO/EYEDEA

traces on the floors and walls and in the bed and then unquestioningly settle in as a roommate. So Perkus spent the first night by himself on the surprisingly soft bed, half-awake in the dark, and then was up to pace the rooms at first light. He dwelled in the space alone just long enough to posit some conjunction between his new self—shorn of so many of its defining accoutrements, dressed in an ill-fitting, lumpish blue-and-orange sports sweatshirt with an iron-on decal name, presumably of some star player, his right temple throbbing with cluster, a really monstrous attack, ebbing in its fashion but still obnoxious, yet his brain also, somehow, seemed to have awoken from a long-fogging dream, a blind spot in sight, yes, but peripheral vision around the occlusion's edges widened, refreshed—between this self and the apartment in which he'd strangely landed, the apartment that had been fitted, like his body, with hand-me-downs, furnishings that would have been rejected even by a thrift shop. The presumption was that if he puzzled at the weird decrepit prints hung over the decaying living-room set, the framed "Streamers" poster, or the Blue Period Picasso guitarist sun-faded to yellow over the nonworking stove in the dummy kitchen, he should be able to divine what sort of person he'd become since the last time his inquiries had turned inward. Who he was seemed actually to have slipped his mind.

Yet no. The rooms weren't going to tell him who he was. They weren't his. This was Ava's apartment, only she hadn't come yet.

Perkus hadn't encountered another soul in the hours he'd been installed in the Friendreth, had only gazed through immovable paint-sealed windows at minute human forms picking through drifts on the Sixty-fifth Street sidewalk seven stories below, the city a distant stilled terrarium. This corner of Sixty-fifth, where the street abutted the scraps of parkland at the edge of Rockefeller University, formed an utter no man's land in the winterscape. He listened at the walls, and through the sound of spasmodic barking imagined he heard a scrape of furniture or a groan or a sigh that could be human, but no voices to give proof, until the morning, when the volunteers began to arrive. Perkus sought to parse Biller's words, a clustery confusion from the night before, working to *grasp what form his new roommate might* take, even as he heard the volunteers at individual doors, calling each apartment's resident by name, murmuring "good boy" or "good girl" as they headed out to use the snowdrifts as a potty.

Even those voicings were faint, the stolid prewar building's heavy lath and plaster making fine insulation, and Perkus could feel confident that he would remain undetected if he wished to be. When clunking footsteps and scrabbling paws led to his threshold, his apartment's unlocked door opened to allow a dog and its walker through. Perkus hid like a killer in the tub, slumping down behind the shower curtain to sit within the porcelain's cool shape. He heard Ava's name spoken then, by a woman who, before leaving, set out a bowl of kibble and another of water on the kitchen floor, and cooed a few more of the sweet doggish nothings a canine lover coos when fingering behind an ear or under a whiskery chin. Biller's words now retroactively assumed a coherent, four-footed shape. Perkus had never lived with a dog. But much had changed just lately, and he was open to new things. He couldn't think of a breed to wish for but had an approximate size in mind, some scruffy mutt with the proportions of, say, a lunch pail. The door shut, and the volunteer's footsteps quickly receded in the corridor. Perkus had done no more than rustle at the plastic curtain, preparing to hoist himself from the tub, when the divider was nudged aside by a white grinning face—slavering rubbery pink lips and dinosaur teeth hinged to a squarish ridged skull nearly the size of his own, this craned forward by a neck and shoulders of pulsing and twitching muscle. One sharp, white, pink-nailed paw curled on the tub's edge as a tongue slapped forth and began brutalizing Perkus's helpless lips and nostrils. Ava the pit bull greeted her roommate with grunts and slobber, her expression demonic, her green-brown eyes, rimmed in pink, showing piggish intellect and gusto, yet helpless to command her smacking, cavernous jaws. From the first instant, before he even grasped his instinctive fear, Perkus understood that Ava did her thinking with her mouth.

The next moment, falling back against the porcelain under her demonstrative assault, watching her struggle and slip as she tried, and failed, to hurtle into the tub after him, as she braced and arched on her two back legs, he saw that the one front paw with which she scrabbled was all she had for scrabbling: Ava was a three-legged dog. This fact would regularly, as it did now, give Perkus a crucial opening—his only physical edge on her, really. Ava slid awkwardly and fell on her side with a thump. Perkus managed to stand. By the time he got himself out of the tub she was on her three legs again, flinging herself upward, forcing that boxy skull, with its smooth, loose-bunching carpet of flesh, into his hands to be adored. Ava was primally terrifying, but she soon persuaded Perkus she didn't mean to turn him into kibble. If Ava killed him it would be accidental, in seeking to stanch her emotional hungers.

Biller had bragged of the high living available at the Friendreth, an apartment building that had been reconfigured into a residence for masterless dogs, an act of charity by a private foundation of blue hairs. Perkus's homeless friend had explained to him that though it was preferable that Perkus keep himself invisible, he had only to call himself a "volunteer" if anyone asked. The real volunteers had come to a tacit understanding with those, like Perkus now, who occasionally slipped into the Friendreth Canine Apartments to stealthily reside alongside the legitimate occupants. Faced head on with the ethical allegory of homeless persons sneaking into human-shaped spaces in a building reserved for abandoned dogs, the pet-rescue workers could be relied upon to defy the Friendreth Society's mandate and let silence cover what they witnessed. Snow and cold made their sympathy that *much more certain. Biller further in*formed Perkus that he shared the building with three other human squatters among the thirty-odd dogs, though none were on his floor or immediately above or below him. Perkus felt no eagerness to renew contact with his own species.

Those first days were all sensual intimacy, a feast of familiarization, an orgy of pair-bonding, as Perkus learned how Ava negotiated the world—or at least the apartment—and how he was to negotiate the boisterous, insatiable dog, who became a kind of new world to him. Ava's surgery scar was clean and pink, an eight- or ten-inch seam from one shoulder blade to a point just short of where he could detect her heartbeat, at a crest of fur beneath her breast. Some veterinary surgeon had done a superlative job of sealing the joint so that she seemed like a muscular furry torpedo, missing nothing. Perkus couldn't tell how fresh the scar was or whether Ava's occasional stumbles indicated that she was still learning to walk on three legs—mostly she made it look natural, and never once did she wince or cringe or otherwise indicate pain, but seemed cheerfully to accept tripod status as her fate. When she exhausted herself trailing him from room to room, she'd sometimes sag against a wall or a chair. More often she leaned against Perkus, or plopped her muzzle across his thigh if he sat. Her mouth would close then, and Perkus could admire the pale brown of her liverish lips, the pinker brown of her nose, and the raw pale pink beneath her scant, stiff whiskers—the same color as her eyelids and the interior of her ears and her scar and the flesh beneath the transparent pistachio shells of her nails. The rest was albino white, save a saucer-size chocolate oval just above her tail to prove, with her hazel eyes, she was no albino. At other times, that mouth was transfixingly open. Even after he'd convinced himself that she'd never intentionally damage him with that massive trap full of erratic, sharklike teeth, Perkus found it impossible not to gaze inside and marvel at the map of pink and white and brown on her upper palate, the wild permanent grin of her throat. And when he let her win the prize she most sought—to clean his ears or neck with her tongue—he'd have a close-up view, more than he could really endure. Easier to endure was her ticklish tongue bath of his toes anytime he shed the ugly Nikes that Biller had given him, though she sometimes nipped between them with a fang in her eagerness to root out the sour traces.

Ava was a listener, not a barker. As they sat together on the sofa, Ava pawing at Perkus occasionally to keep his hands moving on her, scratching her jowls or the base of her ears or the cocoa spot above her tail, she'd also cock her head and meet his eyes and show that she, too, was monitoring the Friendreth Canine Apartments' other dwellers and the volunteers who moved through the halls. (As Perkus studied the building's patterns, he understood that the most certain evidence of human visitors, or other squatters, was the occasional flushing of a toilet.) Ava listened to the periodic fits of barking that possessed the building, yet felt no need to reply. Perkus thought this trait likely extended from the authority inherent in the fantastic power of her own shape, even reduced by the missing limb. He guessed she'd never met another body she couldn't dominate, so why bark? She also liked to gaze out the window whenever he moved a chair to a place where she could make a sentry's perch. Her vigilance was absolutely placid, yet she seemed to find some purpose in it, and could watch the street below for an hour without nodding. This was her favorite sport, apart from love.

Ava let him know they were to sleep in the bed together that first night, joining him there and, then, when he tried to cede it to her, clambering atop him on the narrow sofa to which he'd retreated, spilling her sixty or seventy writhing pounds

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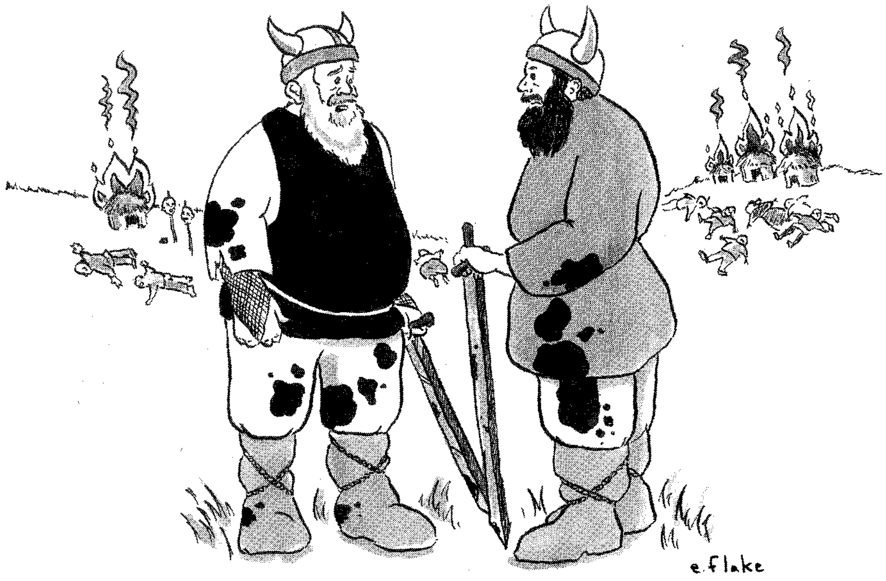

"Did *you* know that 'decimate' means kill just one out of every ten?"

• •

across his body and flipping her head up under his jaw in a crass seduction. That wasn't going to be very restful for either of them, so it was back to the twin-size mattress, where she could fit herself against his length and curl her snout around his hip bone. By the end of the second night, he had grown accustomed to her presence. If he didn't shift his position too much in his sleep she'd still be there when dawn crept around the heavy curtains to rouse him. Often then he'd keep from stirring, ignoring the growing pressure in his bladder, balancing the comfort in Ava's warm weight against the exhausting prospect of her grunting excitement at his waking—she was at her keenest first thing, and he suspected that, like him, she pretended to be asleep until he showed some sign. So they'd lie together both pretending. If he lasted long enough, the volunteer would come and open the door and Ava would jounce up for a walk at the call of her name (and he'd lie still until the echoes of "O.K., Ava, down, girl, down, down, *down*, that's good, no, down, *down*, yes, I love you, too, down, down, *down* . . ." had trickled away along the corridor).

Though the gas was disabled, the Friendreth's electricity flowed, thankfully, just as its plumbing worked. Biller provided Perkus with a hot plate on which he could boil water for coffee, and he'd have a cup in his hand by the time Ava returned from her walk. He imagined the volunteer could smell it when she opened the door. Coffee was the only constant between Perkus's old daily routine and his new one, a kind of lens through which he contemplated his transformations. For there was no mistaking that the command had come, as in Rilke's line: You must change your life. The physical absolutes of coexistence with the three-legged pit bull stood as the outward emblem of a new doctrine: Recover bodily prerogatives, journey into the real. The night of the blizzard and the loss of his apartment and the books and papers inside it had catapulted him into this phase. He held off interpretation for now. Until the stupendous cluster headache vanished, until he learned what Ava needed from him and how to give it, until he became self-sufficient within the Friendreth and stopped requiring Biller's care packages of sandwiches and pints of Tropicana, interpretation could wait.

The final step between Perkus and the dog came when he assumed responsibility for Ava's twice-daily walks. (He'd already several times scooped more kibble into her bowl, when she emptied it, having discovered the supply in the cabinet under the sink.) On the fifth day, Perkus woke refreshed and amazed, alert before his coffee, with his migraine completely vanished. He clambered out of bed and dressed in a kind of exultation that matched the dog's own, for once. He felt sure that Ava was hoping he'd walk her. And he was tired of hiding. So he introduced himself to the volunteer at the door, and said simply that if she'd leave him the leash he'd walk Ava now and in the future. The woman, perhaps fifty, in a lumpy cloth coat, her frizzy hair bunched under a woollen cap, now fishing in a Ziploc of dog treats for one to offer to Ava, having certainly already discerned his presence from any number of clues, showed less surprise than fascination that he'd spoken to her directly. Then she stopped.

"Something wrong with your eye?"

He'd gone unseen by all but Biller for so long that her scrutiny disarmed him. Likely his unhinged eyeball signified differently now that he was out of his suits and dressed instead in homeless-man garb, featuring a two-week beard. To this kindly dog custodian it implied that Ava's spectral cohabitant was not only poor but dissolute or deranged. A firm gaze, like a firm handshake, might be a minimum.

"From birth," Perkus said. He tried to smile as he said it.

"It's cold out."

"I've got a coat and boots." Biller had loaded both into the apartment's closet, for when he'd need them.

"You can control her?"

Perkus refrained from any fancy remarks. "Yes."

On the street, fighting for balance on the icy sidewalks, Perkus discovered what Ava's massiveness and strength could do besides bound upward to pulse in his arms. Even on three legs, she rode and patrolled the universe within the scope of her senses, chastening poodles, pugs, Jack Russells, even causing noble rescued racetrack greyhounds to bolt, along with any cats and squirrels foolish enough to scurry through her zone. Ava had only to grin and grunt, to strain her leash one front-paw hop in their direction, and every creature bristled in fear or bogus hostility, sensing her imperial lethal force. On the street she was another dog, with little regard for Perkus except as the rudder to her sails, their affair suspended until they returned indoors. That first morning out, the glare of daylight stunned Perkus but also fed an appetite he had no idea he'd been starving. The walks became a regular highlight, twice a day, then three times, because why not? Only a minority of female dogs, he learned, bothered with marking behaviors, those scent-leavings typical of all males. Ava was in the exceptional category, hoarding her urine to squirt parsimoniously in ten or twenty different spots. Biller brought Perkus some gloves to shelter his exposed knuckles but also to protect against the chafing of Ava's heavy woven leash, that ship's rigging, on his landlubber palms. Perkus learned to invert a plastic baggie on his splayed fingers and deftly inside-out a curl of her waste to deposit an instant later in the nearest garbage can. Then inside, to the ceremonial hail of barking from the Friendreth's other inhabitants, who seemed to grasp Ava's preferential arrangement through their doors and ceilings.

It was a life of bodily immediacy. Perkus didn't look past the next meal, the next walk, the next bowel movement (with Ava these were like a clock's measure), the next furry, sighing caress into mutual sleep. Ava's volunteer—her name revealed to be Sadie Zapping—poked her head in a couple of times to inquire, and once pointedly intersected with Perkus and Ava during one of their walks, startling Perkus from reverie, and making him feel, briefly, spied upon. But she seemed to take confidence enough from what she witnessed, and Perkus felt he'd been granted full stewardship.

Now the two gradually enlarged their walking orbit, steering the compass of Ava's sniffing curiosity, around the Rockefeller campus and the Weill Cornell Medical Center, onto a bridge over the Drive, to gaze across at the permanent non sequitur of Roosevelt Island, defined for Perkus by its abandoned t.b. hospital, to which no one ever referred, certainly not the population living there and serviced by its goofy tram, as if commuting by ski lift. "No dogs allowed," he reminded Ava every time she seemed to be contemplating that false haven. Or down First Avenue, into the lower Sixties along Second, a nefariously vague zone whose residents seemed to Perkus like zombies, beyond help.

Perkus learned to which patches of snow-scraped earth Ava craved return, a neighborhood map of invisible importances not so different, he decided, from his old paces uptown: from the magazine stand where he preferred to snag the *Times*, to H&H Bagels or the Jackson Hole burger mecca. Perkus never veered in the direction of Eighty-fourth Street, though, and Ava never happened to drag him there. His old life might have rearranged itself around his absence, his building reopened, his paces waiting for him to reinhabit them—but he doubted it. Occasionally he missed a particular book, felt himself almost reaching in the Friendreth toward some blank wall as though he could pull down an oft-browsed volume and find consolation in its familiar lines. Nothing worse than this; he didn't miss the old life in and of itself. The notion that he should cling to a mere apartment he found both pathetic and specious. Apartments came and went, that was their nature, and he'd kept that one too long, so long that he had trouble recalling himself before it. Good riddance. There was mold in the grout of the tiles around the tub which he'd never have got clean in a million years. If Ava could thrive with one forelimb gone, the seam of its removal nearly erased in her elastic hide, he could negotiate minus one apartment,

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and could live with the phantom limb of human interdependency that had seemingly been excised from his life at last.

Biller wasn't a hanger-outer. He had his street scrounger's circuit to follow, and his altruistic one, too, which included checking in with Perkus and, most days, dropping off donated items of food or clothing that he thought might fit. Otherwise, he left Perkus and Ava alone. When Perkus was drawn unexpectedly a step or two back into the human realm, it was Sadie Zapping who drew him. Sadie had other dogs in the building and still looked in from time to time, always with a treat in her palm for Ava to snort up. This day she also had a steaming to-go coffee and a grilled halved corn muffin in a grease-spotted white bag which she offered to Perkus, who accepted it, this being not a time in life of charity refused or even questioned. She asked him his name again and he said it through a mouthful of coffee-soaked crumbs.

"I thought so," Sadie Zapping said. She plucked off her knit cap and shook loose her wild gray curls. "It took me a little while to put it together. Me and my band used to read your stuff all the time. I read you in the *Voice*."

Ah. Existence confirmed, always when you least expected it. He asked the name of her band, understanding that it was the polite response to the leading remark.

"Zeroville," she said. "Like the opposite of Alphaville, get it? You probably saw our graffiti around, even if you never heard us. Our bassist was a guy named Ed Constantine—I mean, he renamed himself that, and he used to scribble our name on every blank square inch in a ten-block radius around CBGB's, even though we only ever played there a couple of times. We did open for Chthonic Youth once." She plopped herself down now, on a chair in Ava's kitchen which Perkus had never pulled out from under the table. He still used the apartment as minimally as possible, as if he were to be judged afterward on how little he'd displaced. Ava gaily smashed her square jowly head across Sadie's lap, into her cradling hands and scrubbing fingers. "Gawd, we used to pore over those crazy posters of yours, or broadsides, if you like. You're a lot younger-looking than I figured. We thought you were like some punk elder statesman, like the missing link to the era of Lester Bangs or Legs McNeil or what have you. It's not like we were holding our breath waiting for you to *review* us or anything, but it sure was nice knowing you were out there, somebody who would have gotten our jokes if he'd had the chance. Crap, that's another time and place, though. Look at us now."

Sadie had begun to uncover an endearing blabbermouthedness (even when not addressing Perkus she'd give forth with a constant stream of *Good girl, there you go, girl, aw, do you have an itchy ear? There you go, that's a girl, yes, yessss, good dog, Ava, whaaata good girl you are!*) but another elegist for Ye Olde Lower East Side was perhaps not precisely what the doctor ordered just now. Perkus, who didn't really want to believe that when his audience made itself visible again it would resemble somebody's lesbian aunt, sensed himself ready to split hairs—*not so much Lester Bangs as Seymour Krim, actually*—but then thought better of it. He was somewhat at a loss for diversions. He couldn't properly claim that he had elsewhere to be.

Sadie, sensing resistance, provided her own non sequitur. "You play cribbage?"

"Sorry?"

"The card game? I'm always looking for someone with the patience and intelligence to give me a good game. Cribbage is a real winter sport, and this is a hell of a winter, don't you think?"

With his consent, the following day Sadie Zapping arrived at the same hour, having completed her walks, and unloaded onto the kitchen table two well-worn decks of cards, a wooden cribbage board with plastic pegs, and two packets of powdered Swiss Miss. Perkus, who hated hot chocolate, said nothing and, when she served it, drained his mug. The game Sadie taught him was perfectly poised between dull and involving, as well as between skill and luck. Perkus steadily lost the first few days, then got the feel of it. Sadie sharpened, too, her best play not aroused until she felt him pushing back. They kept their talk in the arena of the local and mundane: the state of the building; the state of the streets, which had borne another two-inch snowfall, a treacherous slush carpet laid over the now seemingly permanent irregularities of black ice wherever the blizzard had been shoved aside; the ever-improving state of Perkus's cribbage; above all, the state of Ava, who thrived on Sadie's visits and seemed to revel in being discussed. Perkus could, as a result, tell himself that he tolerated the visits on the dog's account. It was nearly the end of February before Sadie told him the tragedy of Ava's fourth limb.

"I thought you knew," she said, a defensive near-apology.

He didn't want to appear sarcastic—did Sadie think Ava had told him?—so said nothing, and let her come out with the tale, which Sadie had spied in Ava's paperwork upon the dog's transfer to the canine dorm. Three-year-old Ava was a citizen of the Bronx, it turned out. She'd lived in the Sack Wern Houses, a public development in the drug dealers' war zone of Soundview, and had been unlucky enough to rush through an ajar door and into the corridor during a police raid on the apartment next door. The policeman who'd emptied his pistol in her direction, one of three cops on the scene, misdirected all but one bullet in his panic, exploding her shank. Another cop, a dog fancier who'd cried out but failed to halt the barrage, had tended the fallen dog, who, even greeted with this injury, wanted only to beseech for love with her tongue and snout. Her owner, a Dominican who may or may not have considered his pit bull ruined for some grim atavistic purpose, balked at the expense and bother of veterinary treatment, so Ava's fate was thrown to the kindly cop's whims. The cop found her the best, a surgeon who knew that she'd be happier spared cycling the useless shoulder limb as it groped for a footing it could never attain, and so excised everything to the breastbone. It was the love-smitten cop who'd named her, ironically, after his daughter, whose terrified mom forbade their adopting the drooling sharky creature. So Ava came into the Friendreth Society's care.

"She's got hiccups," Sadie pointed out another day, a cold one, but then they were all cold ones. "She" was forever Ava, no need to specify. The dog was their occasion and rationale, a vessel for all else unnameable that Perkus Tooth and Sadie Zapping had in common. Which was, finally, Perkus had to admit, not much. Sadie's blunt remarks and frank unattractiveness seemed to permit, if not invite, unabashed inspection, and Perkus sometimes caught himself puzzling backward, attempting to visualize a woman onstage behind a drum kit at the Mudd Club. But that had been, as Sadie had pointed out, another time and place. For all her resonance with his lost world, she might as well have been some dusty LP from his apartment, one that he rarely, if ever, played anymore. If Perkus wanted to reënter his human life, Sadie wasn't the ticket. Anyway, this was Ava's apartment. They were only guests.

"Yeah, on and off for a couple of days now." The dog had been hiccing and gulping between breaths as she fell asleep in Perkus's arms or as she strained her leash toward the next street corner. Sometimes she had to pause in her snorting consumption of the pounds of kibble that kept her sinewy machine running, and once she'd had to cough back a gobbet of bagel and lox that Perkus had tossed her. That instance had seemed to puzzle the pit bull, but otherwise she shrugged off a bout of hiccups as joyfully as she did her calamitous asymmetry.

"Other day I noticed you guys crossing Seventy-ninth Street," Sadie said. On the table between them she scored with a pair of queens. "Thought you never went that far uptown. Weren't there some people you didn't want to run into?"

He regarded her squarely, playing an ace and advancing his peg before shrugging in reply to her question. "We go where she drags us," he said. "Lately, uptown." This left out only the entire truth: that at the instant of his foolish pronouncement a week ago, enunciating the wish to avoid those friends who'd defined the period of his life just previous, he'd felt himself silently but unmistakably reverse the decision. He found himself suddenly curious about his old apartment; he missed his treasure, his time machine assembled from text and grooved vinyl and magnetic tape. He even, if he admitted it, pined for his friends. Without Perkus choosing it, at first without his noticing, the dog had been making him ready for the world again.

So he'd been piloting Ava, rudder driving sails for once, uptown along First Avenue to have a look in the window of the diner called Gracie Mews. He was searching for his friend the retired actor, regular breakfast companion of Perkus's previous existence, the one with whom he'd sorted through the morning paper—Perkus even missed the *Times*, he was appalled to admit—and marvelled at the manifold shames of the twenty-first century. Of all his friends, the actor was the most forgivable, the least culpable in Manhattan's selling out. He was an actor, after all, a player in scripts that he didn't write himself. As was Perkus, if he was honest.

The hiccupping dog could tell soon enough that they were on a mission, and pushed her nose to the Mews's window, too, looking for she knew not what, leaving nose doodles, like slug trails, that frosted in the cold. It turned out that it was possible to wish to become a dog only exactly up to that point where it became completely impossible. Ironically, he was embarrassed to admit to Sadie Zapping, who was a human being, that he wished to be human again. With Ava, he felt no shame. That was her permanent beauty. ♦

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE REAL RHETT BUTLER

The forgotten man behind two of Hollywood's most enduring classics.

BY DAVID DENBY

Howard Hughes, whose acumen outside certain areas of expertise (aeronautics and the acquisition of beautiful actresses) was rarely sound, once said something intelligent about the relative merits of two movie directors. The remark was delivered in early 1939, when George Cukor had been shooting "Gone with the Wind" for about three weeks. An adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's thousand-page blockbuster novel, from 1936, about the Old South, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, the movie was the largest and most expensive production in Hollywood up to that time, with a huge cast, massive sets (the city of Atlanta was burned down and then rebuilt), and hundreds of unshaven and bandaged extras trudging across the landscape. As half of Hollywood maliciously cheered, the production slipped into disaster. The script could be kindly described as a mess, and the star—Clark Gable—was in turmoil. The initial rushes displeased David O. Selznick, the legendary, manic producer who dominated every aspect of the film, and he suddenly fired Cukor, who, he later said, couldn't have handled the more spectacular elements of the movie. In Cukor's place, Selznick hired Victor Fleming, who was then directing the other big picture in town, "The Wizard of Oz." Fleming was a vigorous and resourceful man, but few people considered him an artist. The change pleased Gable but distressed the two female leads—the young stage and film actress Vivien Leigh, just arrived from England and not yet a star, and Olivia de Havilland, who was then Howard Hughes's girlfriend. Both women depended on Cukor, who was known as a "woman's director," and de Havilland brought her troubles to Hughes, who advised: "Don't worry, everything is going to be all right—with George and Victor, it's the same talent, only Victor's is strained through a coarser sieve."

Hughes was almost correct. Fleming's talent was not "the same" as Cukor's, yet he was definitely the right man for "Gone with the Wind," and he did inventive and powerful work on "Oz." But in the seventy years since the release of those films, Fleming, whose talent flowed not smoothly or subtly, but roughly, in surges of energy and feeling, has been largely forgotten. The auteur-theory critics who, in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, went wild over Cukor, Hitchcock, Preminger, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Ernst Lubitsch, Josef von Sternberg, Frank Capra, and many other directors of the late silent and early sound periods, ignored Fleming, though he had made a number of entertaining movies in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and his two superproductions of 1939 are very likely the most widely seen movies in American film history—not just good pictures but films that have entered the unconscious of generations of moviegoers. "Gone with the Wind," with its happy plantation slaves—emblems of Noble Toil—posed against reddening skies, has its enraging and embarrassing moments; the racist kitsch is, regrettably, part of the nation's collective past. What remains remarkably modern in the film is the central combat of wills between Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara and Gable's Rhett Butler, each seeking the upper hand in and out of bed. Margaret Mitchell set up the conflict, but it was Fleming who got the two actors to embody it. As for "The Wizard of Oz," the movie's version of the magical land of Oz, in its combined freedom and unease, happiness and fear, has become a

Victor Fleming (seated second from right) w

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: MGM/PHOTOFEST

vien Leigh and Clark Gable on the set of "Gone with the Wind," in 1939, the year he also made "The Wizard of Oz."

universally shared vision of the imagination itself. Since Fleming was the element common to both movies, it's time for his contribution to be lifted out of the shadows.

The seventieth anniversary of these two classics has seen deluxe new (and expensive) versions on DVD, and the appearance of two good books: "Victor Fleming: An American Movie Master" (Pantheon; $40), a full-scale biography that shines up the director's reputation, by Michael Sragow, the film critic of the Baltimore *Sun,* who has written for this magazine; and "Frankly, My Dear: 'Gone with the Wind' Revisited" (Yale; $24), by Molly Haskell, whose 1973 study "From Reverence to Rape" remains a standard text on women in movies. Haskell has lived in Manhattan for more than forty years, but she grew up in Richmond, Virginia, and as a girl she became obsessed with Margaret Mitchell's rebellious Southern belle, Scarlett, as personified in the movie by Leigh—a selfish, greedy, flirtatious yet sex-hating, intractable green-eyed demon who is every inch and flounce a heroine.

When summoned by Selznick, Fleming hadn't read Mitchell's novel, but he took a look at the screenplay and immediately told the producer, "Your fucking script is no fucking good." Selznick had owned the property since the book's publication, and in 1936 he had hired the East Coast playwright and screenwriter Sidney Howard to do an adaptation. Howard turned in a faithful but overlong version, and Selznick began fiddling. At one time or another, as many as fifteen writers worked on the movie, until finally, in early 1939, as production stalled and hundreds of salaried people sat around idle, Selznick turned to Ben Hecht, the greatest and most cynical of Hollywood screenwriters. Hecht agreed to work on the script as long as he didn't have to read the book. Selznick told him the plot, but he couldn't make any sense of it, so Selznick retrieved Howard's version, and, as Hecht listened, Selznick and Fleming read it aloud, Selznick taking the role of Scarlett, Fleming reading Rhett.

In this manner, the three men worked eighteen or twenty hours a day, sustained by Dexedrine, peanuts, and bananas, a combination that Selznick believed would stimulate the creative process. On the fourth day, according to Hecht, a blood vessel burst in Fleming's eye. On the fifth, Selznick, eating a banana, swooned, and had to be revived by a doctor. Many good Hollywood movies have been saved by last-minute revisions, but this ill-fed, hazardous, all-male acting-and-writing marathon must be the strangest of all interventions. Oddly, it may also provide a key to the movie's success: Selznick, an epic (and often hapless) Hollywood womanizer, nevertheless had, Molly Haskell claims, genuine and delicate insights into women's feelings, and, in some crucial way (strengthened, perhaps, by his reading her part), he identified with Scarlett. Fleming, tall, strong, and startlingly handsome—Selznick ruefully called him "the most attractive man, in my opinion, who ever came to Hollywood"—did not chase women; they chased him. The director was considered by everyone to be a "man's man"—shrewd, funny, but bluff and demanding—and he was close in temperament to the hard-nosed character of Rhett Butler. It's possible that the extraordinary balance between Scarlett and Rhett was sealed at this moment.

Gable had been worried all along about his ability to play Rhett, an emotionally demanding role, and he yearned for Fleming's support. He had worked with him before, in 1932—in the deliciously entertaining sex-in-the-jungle romantic drama "Red Dust," in which he co-starred with Jean Harlow—and he had taken a lot from Fleming's manner of brusque masculine humor. Cukor, however, as people noted at the time, made Gable nervous and angry. Gable was afraid that Cukor might swing the movie toward its actresses, especially Vivien Leigh. In recent years, a more piquant speculation has surfaced: that Gable, in his early days in Hollywood, had been a gigolo and had had a few gay encounters. In this telling, someone in Cukor's circle had been gossiping about Gable's past, and Gable, jealous of his reputation as the hetero "king" of Hollywood, grew alarmed.

Fleming's presence restored the star's self-assurance. After Hecht edited Sidney Howard's script (in the end, Howard got sole credit), the production got under way again, and Gable, once more imitating Fleming's manner (Sragow calls the director "the real Rhett Butler"), wound up doing the best, most expressive acting of his career. The actresses did well, too. De Havilland provided the movie with a moral center, and Leigh, though hardly fond of Fleming, gave one of the most electrifying performances in the history of movies. As Fleming pulled together Selznick's monster production during the day, he supervised the editing of "The Wizard of Oz" at night. He may have been an artist after all.

Fleming, at right, with Jean Harlow and Jerome Kern on the set of "Reckless," in 1935.

MGM / KOBAL COLLECTION

Victor Fleming's mother was of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction (the longtime Hollywood rumor that Fleming was part Cherokee is nothing more than that); his father was from

Missouri. The family went west, and Fleming was born, in 1889, near Pasadena, then a hamlet so primitive that his father, a citrus rancher, helped lay the public water-supply system. He died of a heart attack, in a family-managed orange orchard, when Fleming was four. Years later, the director wrote, "There is little room in my life for sentiment and soft words," which is the kind of statement that tough American men in the nineteen-twenties and thirties often made to cover a deeper current of feeling. Dropping out of school in his mid-teens, Fleming became fascinated by speed and by the new machines that produced it, cars and airplanes, as well as by the new machine that captured it, the motion-picture camera. In his early twenties, he briefly tried his hand at car-racing, but wound up a chauffeur in Santa Barbara, where he fell in with the pioneer movie director Allan Dwan. Taking over as a cameraman on Dwan's films, Fleming found a trade. A photograph of him from this period reveals an almost unnervingly forceful young man with hostile eyes and a wedged pompadour. He looks less like a movie person than like a young officer out of uniform.

By 1915, he was shooting the films that Dwan made with Douglas Fairbanks, and, four years later, Fleming became Fairbanks's director. They made just three movies together—"When the Clouds Roll By" (1919), "The Mollycoddle" (1920), and the mock documentary "Around the World in Eighty Minutes" (1931)—but they became lifelong friends. Fairbanks's movies often had a satirical bent: the smiling young man, throwing himself around the set and showing off his skills as a gymnast, outraged the boors and the stuffed shirts. Off the set, the two men carried on in the same way. They jumped over chairs and couches in hotel lobbies, swung through trains by holding onto overhead racks; they leaped from a twelve-foot height (in one version of the story, from a burning hayloft), first Fleming and then Fairbanks, and each broke an ankle.

In the early twenties, Fleming became close to Howard Hawks, and, in the same spirit of macho competitiveness, they took up aviation, building and flying ramshackle planes that smashed their landing gear on hitting the ground. The risk-taking shenanigans, the strenuous, dangerous fun, were an essential part of the carefree ethos that found its way into countless movies and that formed, for better or worse, a good part of the American masculine ideal in the twentieth century.

Sragow is immensely attentive to Fleming's films, and he traces in detail the fortunes of all the people connected to them, but his book is held together by what can only be called the romance of movie-making in the studio era—the large, free, hard-drinking life that the men (but rarely the women) enjoyed when movies were still made quickly and relatively cheaply, craft was spoken of with respect, and art was barely mentioned. Some of the episodes in Fleming's life play like scenes from the movies of the time—for instance, his killing a charging rhinoceros in East Africa an instant before it slammed into one of his friends. Or his showing up with a case of Scotch after the alcoholic Spencer Tracy had gone on a bender and had failed to report to the set of Fleming's 1937 film "Captains Courageous." According to Tracy, Fleming told him to drink up the entire case—he was through with worrying about him. Abashed, Tracy sobered up and got back to work. Fleming, in effect, administered the reviving smack that figured in so many movies of the period (including his own)—the slap across the kisser that brought people to their senses.

As Sragow points out, Fleming had learned something essential from his capering association with Douglas Fairbanks—how to position a performer within the frame and time his performance in such a way that the camera brought out his temperament and his strength. This would seem an essential skill for any filmmaker, yet a surprising number of directors, obsessed with visual expressiveness, are inattentive to it. Fleming didn't give detailed instructions to his actors; rather, he talked about the character, and located and enlarged a set of defining traits—a strain of feeling or humor—in whomever he was working with. Then the actors, working intimately for the camera, performed what in effect were idealized versions of themselves, creating a persona that connected with a widespread public fantasy. Fleming, along with such directors as Ford and William Wyler, had the star-making skill that Hollywood has now lost.

It was Fleming, directing the canonical Western "The Virginian" (1929), who shifted Gary Cooper's minimalist stoicism into a subtly but steadily revealing undercurrent of emotion. In "Captains Courageous," he helped Tracy focus his threatening manner into a single strong shaft of feeling with the slightly off-center rhythm that became Tracy's signature. Gable, Cooper, and Tracy all produced variations on the ideal of a courageous, good-humored American male, and they all borrowed, to some degree, from Fleming. What they found in him was ease and authority. What women found in him, apart from good looks, fun, and romance (he had affairs with many of his actresses, including Clara Bow and Norma Shearer), was a current of self-confidence that they could draw on. "Despite his later reputation as a 'man's director,' " Sragow says, "Fleming launched or cannily revamped a host of female stars from the 1920s on." The hot-wired Bow did her sexiest, best work for him, in "Mantrap" (1926), and he got sensationally funny performances out of Jean Harlow in "Red Dust," "Bombshell" (1933), and "Reckless" (1935). The sacred male companionships of seventy years ago did not have the effect of downgrading women—anything but. Fleming, along with his friend Hawks, created women onscreen who were resourceful, strong-willed, and sexual—the kind of women they wanted to hang out with, partners and equals who gave as good as they got. For a while, they, too, were an American ideal.

The auteurist critics look for recurring patterns, the incandescent joining of visual style and idea. You can't find such patterns, or even a consistent visual motif, in Fleming's movies. But you can find a powerful grasp of fable—the emotional progression of a small number of clearly drawn characters through a decisively shaped tale, leading to a series of wrenching encounters and a satisfying climax. In "Captains Courageous," a brilliant but snotty American rich kid (Freddie Bartholomew) falls off an ocean liner. Tracy's Portuguese fisherman pulls him out of the sea and throws him in with the crew of his trawler, who knock him into shape. As Sragow points out, what the boy becomes is not a decent jolly fellow but the superior young man he was bred to become. The movie is less sentimental than it at first appears, as was Fleming's "Treasure Island" (1934), starring Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper, which caught the scariness and the strangeness felt by a boy cast among thieves and scoundrels. In these two movies, growing up is a trial—a passage through fear, a test of character.

In retrospect, it seems hard to imagine anyone but Fleming directing "The Wizard of Oz," the greatest child-centered movie of all. Yet he wasn't the first choice on this film, either. In October, 1938, the film began shooting at M-G-M under Richard Thorpe, a journeyman who had directed a Tarzan picture in 1936. Thorpe's footage was flat, and the producer, Mervyn LeRoy, threw it out. (Bizarrely, Cukor also briefly worked on "Oz." After Thorpe was fired, Cukor dropped in, changed Judy Garland's makeup and hair style, and fled; the material didn't interest him.) LeRoy then turned to Fleming, who initially said no, as much of the production, including the screenplay and the sets, was already in place. By this time, however, Fleming had got married—to Lu Rosson, who had been the wife of a close friend—and he was the father of two little girls, whom he adored. He left few memos or letters, but, from what he wrote about "Oz" for an internal M-G-M publication, one gets the impression that he changed his mind because he wanted to make an entertainment that both adults and children could see.

The screenwriters Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf adapted "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," L. Frank Baum's classic 1900 novel, and they made two momentous changes. In Baum's book, Oz is a wondrous place, but it's real—Dorothy, still in her house, is carried there by a raging cyclone. In the movie, Dorothy (Judy Garland), conked on the head during the storm, spins into Oz in a dream, and Oz becomes the blossoming of her unconscious, populated by strikingly familiar faces joined to weird bodies: her intimidating neighbor Miss Gulch shows up as the lime-green Wicked Witch of the West, and the farmhands employed by Dorothy's stern Auntie Em become her sweetly despondent companions with missing parts—the Scarecrow (Ray Bolger) and the Tin Man (Jack Haley). Fleming, working with his favorite screenwriter, John Lee Mahin, added a third farmhand, Zeke, who became the Cowardly Lion (Bert Lahr). He also reconceived the Kansas scenes, giving them a sharper edge. He changed what had become (unbelievably) yellow ovals in Thorpe's production back to the immortal yellow bricks, and commissioned the signature song "Follow the Yellow Brick Road" from Yip Harburg and Harold Arlen. Fleming did not direct the Kansas scenes, which were shot in black and white. They were scheduled for the end of the shoot; by that time, he had gone off to work on "Gone with the Wind," and they were done by the director King Vidor. But the main body of the movie, from the moment that Dorothy opens the door to Oz and the screen turns to brilliant Technicolor—a stunner in 1939, and still exciting today—belongs to Fleming.

Dorothy's immortality, in the person of Judy Garland, was not easily achieved. Garland, who had been fussed over and bullied by M-G-M since she had signed with the studio, in 1935, was a very self-conscious, uncertain, but blazingly talented sixteen-year-old, playing a girl of about twelve. Her eagerness and tenderness are still touching, as an idealized portrait of a child, but Fleming wanted Dorothy to be tough as well, and the neurotic star gave him fits. In one scene, Garland bops Lahr's Cowardly Lion on the snout, and Lahr's blubbering was so funny that Garland cracked up, and then lost control of herself, laughing hysterically through take after take. She stood behind a synthetic tree, saying to herself, "I will not laugh. I will not laugh," but, when she ruined yet another take, Fleming slapped her across the face and said, "All right, now. Go back to your dressing room." (The slap was something of a Fleming trademark, onscreen and off.) She came out some time later and got on with the rest of the movie. In the end, her Dorothy, an orphan raised by a Depression-era aunt (her uncle hardly exists), turns out to be surprisingly strong. The way Fleming directs her, Dorothy has a clumpy farm girl's grit—she's a literal-minded kid fiercely clinging to her hopes and desires among witches, blue-faced flying monkeys, and squeaking little people. She undergoes a journey of epic proportions, only to arrive back in Kansas, where she finds that her true self was there all along. It's an ending that Salman Rushdie, in an affectionate short book he wrote about the movie, deplores: Dorothy, he says, no longer needs the inadequate adults in her life; she's ready to go out on her own. Yet we assume—don't we?—that Dorothy, though she stays home, has been changed by what she has imagined. In her dreams, she has faced down demons, overcome a loss of faith—she has been tested, just like Fleming's child heroes in "Treasure Island" and "Captains Courageous."

Apart from the scenes with the hoodoos and the winged monkeys, Fleming's direction is earthbound, and that's the way it should be. The picture's veteran music-hall stars—Bolger, Haley, and Lahr—need to work on the ground; indeed, they have an intimate, virtuosic relation to the ground. When Lahr lands on his rump, his legs shoot up like a moving swing suddenly emptied of its child. Bolger does flailing, rubber-legged collapses and recoveries—he teases the ground, engaging it and then taking off from it. And Haley, in his rusting metal case, leans perilously, like a telephone pole in a storm. Academics have told me that "Oz" is a mythic structure, a descendant of the Odyssey or the Aeneid, but they look at me blankly when I say that the movie is also a summa of nineteen-thirties show business. Fleming framed his vaudevillians and musical-comedy performers as he had framed Cooper and Tracy—he brought out their individual genius as performers. He might have moved the camera more, or done some point-of-view shooting, but his square, stable, front-and-center view is essentially the right directorial strategy for this performance-dominated fantasy. Many talented people worked on "Oz," but, as Sragow says, without Fleming's enthusiasm and discipline "the movie would have collapsed into campy chaos." Fleming combined the elements into an emotionally overwhelming fable, which was always his supreme gift.

Judged as an example of storytelling (if not for the story it tells), "Gone with the Wind" can't be much faulted, either. The Civil War begins, crests, and reaches a disastrous conclusion with the destruction of Atlanta, and mournfulness holds sway through the middle of the epic. Yet, if keening over the Old South had been the movie's sole thematic line, "Gone with the Wind," as Molly Haskell notes, would have been forgotten, along with many mossy plantation novels and films of the period. Barbarous Rhett and Scarlett push the gracious-plantation nostalgia out of the way. A Southern-born war profiteer, Rhett doesn't believe in "the cause" of secession, while Scarlett finds the war merely tiresome (the foolish young men run away to get killed, spoiling the parties). For all its fustian, the picture offers an enchanting idiosyncrasy: a saga of a broken nation is told from the point of view of a vain and restless girl. At the beginning, in one of the cinema's indelible images, Leigh's sixteen-year-old Scarlett floats rapidly across the grass and through the trees in a virgin-white layered dress. Pauline Kael once compared Leigh to a Dresden-china shepherdess, an image that captures the delicacy of her features and her body but not their mobility. As the small mouth puckers, the lynx-eyed glance, with head slightly turned, appears to see around corners. The quickness of her responses is almost frightening. Wariness and avidity, coquetry and rage, preening and despair—unrelenting egotism plays on her face like sunlight on a fast-moving stream. Amid the terrible events of the war, her Scarlett, the implacable "me," is obsessed with nothing but her own affairs, and Fleming urged Leigh to give Scarlett's bitchiness full rein.

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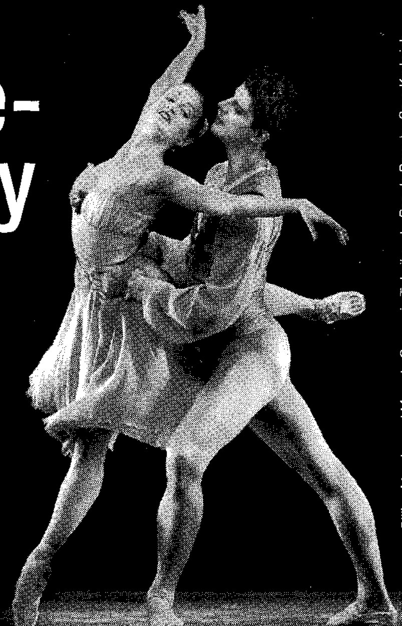

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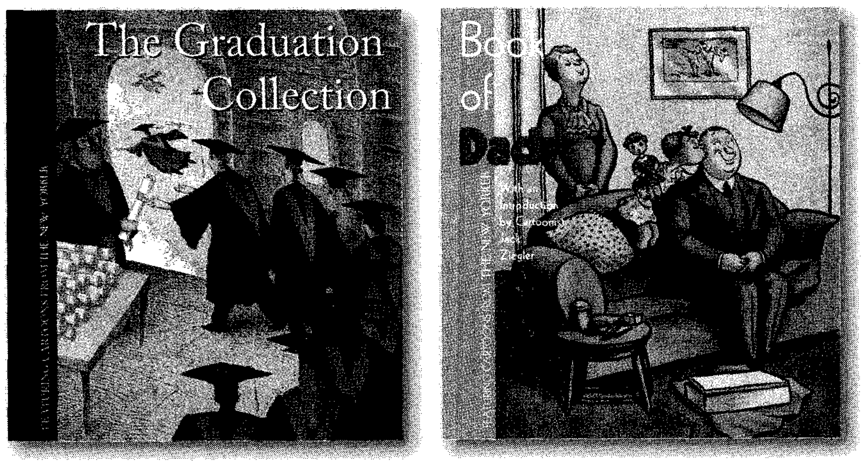
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entrance that any movie actor has ever enjoyed. As Leigh looks down while ascending a grand staircase, Gable, broad across the shoulders and pulled in (actually girdled) at the waist, stands at the bottom and brazenly gazes up at her. She says to a friend, "He looks as if—as if he knows what I look like without my shimmy." Gable's appreciative stare was usually enough to make the women in his movies tumble, but Scarlett resists for a long time, marrying two men, both nonentities, before marrying Rhett, and then she does so mostly for his money. Her resistance to him even after marriage—her choice of power over sex and romantic love—fascinates Haskell. "Inside the tinkling charms of a Southern-belle saga," she writes, "are the rumblings of a feminist manifesto." After the war, Scarlett not only takes over America's most famous fictional turf, the ruined plantation Tara, but scandalizes Atlanta society by becoming a hard-driving lumber entrepreneur—apparently the first female capitalist of the New South. Margaret Mitchell had enjoyed a brief fling as a flapper, and Haskell maintains that she transposed the rebellious spirit of women of the nineteen-twenties into the heart and body of a nineteenth-century social butterfly. This compositional strategy not only retrieved Scarlett from the past but projected her into the future, and Leigh, abetted by Fleming, sustained Scarlett as a perverse, good-bad heroine for our times, a shrew who won't be tamed.

For seventy years, ever since teenage girls started reading the novel with a flashlight under the covers, this romantic misalliance has remained a subject of speculation and debate—a pop-culture obsession serving as a template for a nation's romantic dreams and regrets. In the famous "rape" scene, Gable, with an unwilling Leigh in his arms, surges up a crimson stairway to the bedroom, and after that point the movie, as Haskell says, astonishingly lurches from bodice-ripper to something like tragic drama. Tracking the stages of the struggle between husband and wife, Haskell discovers a conflict in her own responses: she loves Scarlett's ambition but finds the marital disaster, which is partly produced by it, almost heartbreaking, especially since Rhett isn't the usual villain of feminist critique—a dominating husband who wants to crush his spirited wife. On the contrary, he loves his wife for exactly what she is. Looking at the movie again, one can glean the truth from certain shadings in Leigh's performance: her rage at Gable contains more than a hint of panic, a suggestion by the actress that, for Scarlett, sexual happiness might lead to an intolerable loss of will. In all, as a portrait of a couple at war, there's nothing quite so intense and sustained in American movies, and Fleming sharpened it to the point of violence. No surprise: on a much smaller scale, and largely as comedy, he had done something similar in the rowdy give-and-take between Gable and Harlow in "Red Dust," a romance in which each partner is initially too proud to admit to loving the other.

On the "Gone with the Wind" set, Fleming teased and cajoled Leigh; at times, they battled as much as Rhett and Scarlett. Walking off after a bad day, he said, "Miss Leigh, you can stick this script up your royal British ass," a not particularly elegant variant of "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." But their dislike for each other may have kept the movie dramatically alive. In one of the scenes in which Rhett moves in on Scarlett, Fleming instructed her, "Resist but don't resist too much." Yet, as Gable reached for her, she slapped him. This particular blow, one imagines, may have been a retaliatory act aimed as much at Fleming as at Rhett. In any case, Fleming was very pleased with the scene ("That's swell!"), and it stayed in the movie. The ethos of toughness was applied to Gable, too, and with unprecedented results. If Gable began the project afraid that episodes from his past life might make him look effeminate, he nevertheless gave way, under his mentor's insistent prodding, to "feminine" emotions he had never shown before (nor after), including bafflement when a beautiful woman doesn't want him, increasing despair, and even, at times, tearful grief.

All through the shoot, Fleming took vitamin shots to keep up his energy, and downers at the end of the day, and he became so jangled and tired, and so enraged by Selznick's daily memos about virtually every shot, that he retreated, under a doctor's orders, to his beach house, in Balboa. For eighteen days, the M-G-M staff director Sam Wood took over. But Fleming came back and, muttering mildly anti-Semitic remarks to friends, reshot scenes as Selznick requested, and assisted in the editing. He directed, by common estimate, about sixty per cent of the film. A few of the scenes that Cukor shot (none with Gable and Leigh alone) survived the final cut, and, after he was dismissed, on days off from shooting, Cukor coached both Leigh and de Havilland at his house, so he may be responsible for some of the nuances in those two performances. Yet it was Fleming who saved the project from dissolution and got the man-woman struggle at the heart of it down right, and he deserves a good part of the credit for the movie's becoming the cultural monument that millions still adore.

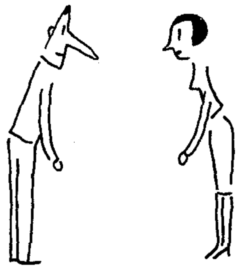
The best movie Fleming made after his exhausting labors of 1939 was a new version of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1941), with Spencer Tracy in the title roles and, as Hyde's victim, a startlingly sexual Ingrid Bergman, who was Fleming's last movie-star girlfriend. He died eight years later, of heart failure, in the arms of his wife, Lu, at the age of fifty-nine, and immediately slipped into obscurity. What should history make of him? He didn't direct the entirety of either of his two classics, and he wasn't, by definition, an auteur.

But this absence from the list of the blessed suggests a fault in auteur theory and not in Fleming—a prejudice against the generalists, the non-obsessed, the "chameleons," as Steven Spielberg called them, who re-created themselves for each project and made good movies in many different styles. Talent, when poured through "a coarser sieve," can assert itself in rough-and-ready humor, resilience, and all-around hardiness and strength. Cinema's historians should celebrate, as audiences always have, not only the obsessed geniuses but also the adaptable ruffians who made many of the most entertaining movies ever to come out of Hollywood. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The First Tycoon, *by T.J. Stiles (Knopf; $37.50).* In the panic of 1869, Cornelius Vanderbilt "appeared in the role of a hero," Stiles writes, praised for steadying the markets with his confidence and his cash. In reality, Vanderbilt's own machinations had helped push the markets to the brink. He gambled not only his fortune but, with it, the "health of the national economy," and "the only thing more remarkable than his recklessness was his success." Vanderbilt started out running a ferry off Staten Island and went on to control shipping lines and railroads; he built Grand Central with his own money. The canvas of his life is so large that giants like Jay Gould appear as bit characters. (There's also Tennessee Claflin, a "magnetic physician" and clairvoyant turned stockbroker; Stiles thinks that she and Vanderbilt had an affair but discounts some of the more vivid stories about their relationship.) Mark Twain described Vanderbilt as something like the Grinch, the "idol of . . . a crawling swarm of small souls"—a cartoon that Stiles does a good job of redrawing.

The Age of the Unthinkable, *by Joshua Cooper Ramo (Little, Brown; $25.99).* In this "revolutionary era of surprise and innovation," Ramo argues that America needs a new "grand strategy" that resembles an immune system in its flexibility and resilience. To illustrate the methods he has in mind, Ramo entertainingly examines subjects as diverse as fish ecology and Hezbollah guerrilla tactics. Unfortunately, he never quite supports his claim that the world faces an unprecedented "avalanche of ceaseless change" that renders existing approaches obsolete. The two decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall don't seem more tumultuous, for example, than those between the Crash of '29 and the Berlin Airlift. More significant, Ramo's charge that the current policy bureaucracy has failed us rings false. From the Iraq insurgency to the housing bubble, our expert planners warned us what was coming; politicians and the public chose to ignore them.



The Way Home, *by George Pelecanos (Little, Brown; $24.99).* Notions of revenge, redemption, and justice fuel this thriller, set in Washington, D.C. After a stint in juvenile hall, Chris Flynn sets out to turn his life around, taking a job as a carpet installer for his father, a flooring supplier, despite their contentious relationship. When Chris and a friend find fifty thousand dollars hidden beneath the floorboards at a job site, they must contend with a pair of sadistic ex-cons eager to reclaim the money, stolen during a jewelry heist years earlier. Despite its hard-charging elements, the story unfolds almost languidly, and it is clear that Pelecanos, a seasoned novelist and a writer for "The Wire," means to provoke more than quickened heartbeats. His passionate advocacy for juvenile-prison reform—and his well-reasoned argument that a poorly run system can punish petty offenders far more severely than their crimes merit—occasionally turns the plot into a polemic.

All the Living, *by C. E. Morgan (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23).* This lyrical tale of grief and gruelling love on a tobacco farm takes place in the mid-nineteen-eighties but, if not for glimpses of linoleum and double-wides, might recall an earlier time. Aloma is an orphan who teaches piano at a mountain mission school; Orren is a "college farm boy" who glances at her sideways and "she thought that was wicked and could not help but like it." When his family is killed in a car crash, Orren inherits their remote farm, and Aloma comes to live there, despite her dream of being a musician in the "real world." Morgan is an expansive stylist, fond of rare words ("letheless," "mortise") and of the circumlocutions that can pass for plain speaking, but her pacing is shrewd. By the time the harvest is done, two lonely people are fused, if not consoled.

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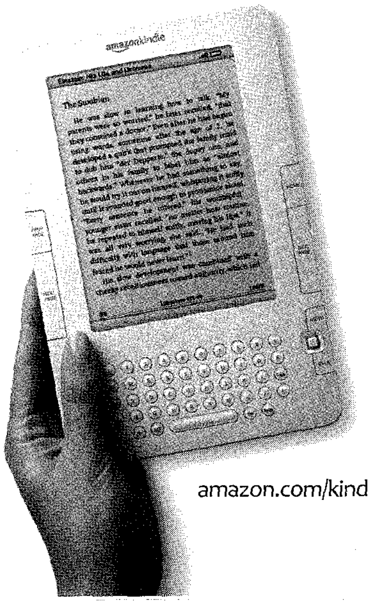

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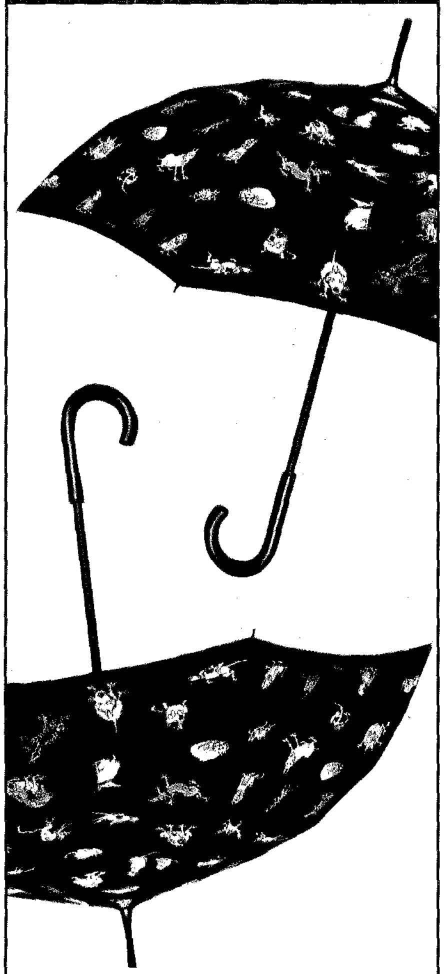

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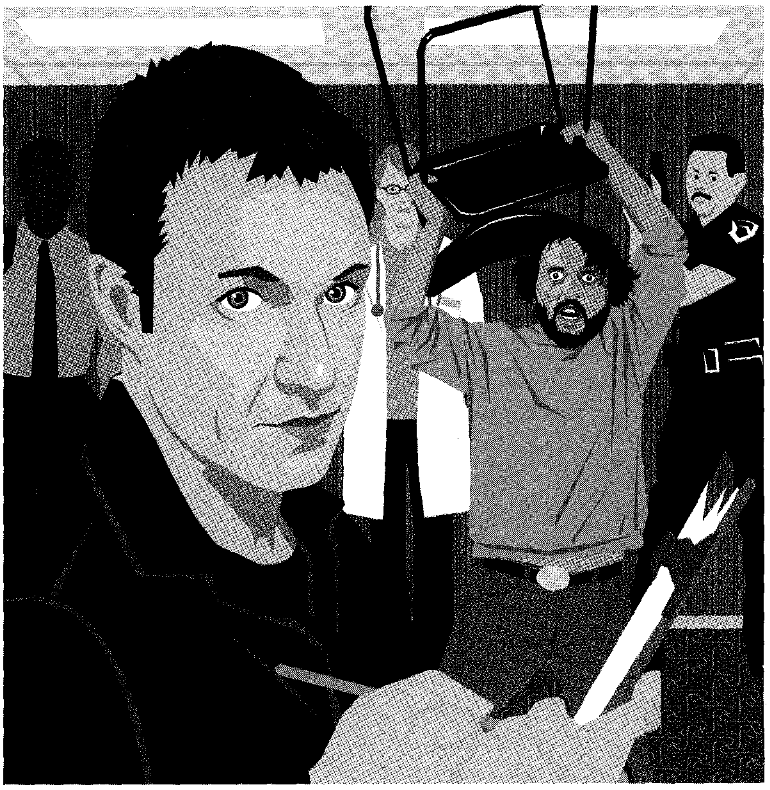
ON TELEVISION

MENTAL NOTES

Fox's new hospital drama.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



Chris Vance as the head of a Los Angeles psychiatric ward in "Mental."

There has been so much good television in the past decade ("The Sopranos" and "The West Wing," for example, started in 1999) that we can almost forget sometimes that TV programs are a commodity. When we love a show, we think of the skill and the gifts of those who created it, and of the actors, the writers, and possibly the directors involved, and occasionally the guy (it's always a guy, you may have noticed) who does the soundtrack. Beyond that, there's not much we need to know about how the show came into being. It's the mediocre shows that make you stop and wonder: How did this happen? What made anyone think that there was anything about this show that made it worth watching? *Did* anyone think that? The networks, ultimately, are not concerned with whether a show they put on the air is any good, at least not in the sense that viewers define the word. You see evidence of this all the time: a network renews a bad show, cancels a good show, or puts on a new show and promotes it as being terrific and later reveals that insiders knew all along that it stank, as Jeff Zucker, then the president of NBC Entertainment, did in the case of the ghastly 2003 comedy "Coupling."

"Mental," a new drama on Fox, starting May 26th, is solidly mediocre; it's not good, it's not terrible, and there's no reason for it to exist. It's set in the psychiatric ward of a Los Angeles hospital, and, as the series begins, a new department head is about to arrive. The scuttlebutt is that he's not up to the task, since he's coming from a clinic in Vermont and couldn't possibly handle the pace or the problems of a big-city hospital. Pshaw! Of course he can! At the beginning of the first episode—after we've met two young psychiatric residents, their pissy supervisor, Dr. Carl Belle (Derek Webster), and a staff psychiatrist, Dr. Veronica Hayden-Jones (Jacqueline McKenzie), who was passed over for the job that the newcomer will be filling—there's a scene at the admitting desk, in which a wild-eyed, unkempt man shakes free of his handlers, strips his clothes off, and starts ranting and throwing things. (The actor who plays him, Silas Weir Mitchell, is frequently cast in roles like this one. The instant you see him, you know what's going to happen.) Out of the blue, another man near the desk, this one calm, handsome, kempt, with a gaze that telegraphs a quick intelligence, suddenly strips down, too, and speaks to the deranged man as though they were kindred spirits. Oh, hell, you think. This is the new guy. And so it is. It's Jack Gallagher (Chris Vance), who doesn't, you know, play by the rules. He has an immediate, intuitive grasp of the situation, and knows how to make the patient feel understood and less alone.

The scene doesn't ring true, and neither does most of what follows. Jack's a confident, iconoclastic charmer, or is meant to be; the way Vance conveys that is to smile boyishly, as if he were George Clooney flirting with a talk-show host, whether it's appropriate to the situation or not. It's quite annoying, actually, this implied connection between Gallagher's puckish smile and his medical ingenuity. Vance seems to have been cast for his looks, which are made up of five parts Sting, three parts a younger, better-looking Harvey Keitel, and one part each of Timothy Daly and David Cassidy. He was on the Fox drama "Prison Break" for fourteen episodes, and now, with this role, he joins the club of Commonwealth actors who are making off with leading dramatic roles in American television, whose members include Simon Baker, Damian Lewis, John Noble, and Hugh Laurie. (Vance and Noble, who is currently playing the brilliant, slightly mad scientist on "Fringe," both put in time on a long-running Australian medical drama, "All Saints," the Down Under equivalent of "E.R.")

There's something off not just with Vance's performance but with every aspect of "Mental," which is essentially an imitation "House." It seemed promising that Annabella Sciorra was in the cast, but her role as a hospital administrator whose mixed feelings about Gallagher—they have a past, which began at a medical conference—leave her with little to do except slap his wrist when his antics go too far and at the same time defend him against complaints. The residents are antimagnetic, as are Gallagher's colleagues Drs. Belle and Hayden-Jones. None of them, it has to be said, even seem very intelligent. Hayden-Jones raises her eyebrows in surprise when she finds out that Gallagher is board-certified—as if there were a chance that the head of a psych ward in a Los Angeles hospital wouldn't be. (The clinic he ran in Vermont, it is revealed, was for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.)

It is hard to dramatize mental illness and treatment—to do it effectively, you'd probably have to go outside a linear narrative structure. "Mental" does that from time to time, with flashbacks that provide some clue to patients' current conditions, but over all the storytelling is both plodding and repellently inspirational. There's a Patch Adams quality to Gallagher; he sends the day patients outdoors to play instruments and run races on the lawn. Naturally, Gallagher has demons. He has a sister in the area, who calls him frequently and hangs up without speaking; all we know about her is that she has dropped out of her life and out of her family. But this is the only element of the story that seems to hold out possibilities. I was puzzled by how a show that's such a nothing even got made. It turns out that "Mental" is Fox's first co-production with international partners in an effort to develop and package series for both the United States and the world market, and shoot them outside the U.S. in order to save money. "Mental" was filmed in Bogotá, in Fox's Colombia studios. It has already been sold to three dozen other countries. Beyond the reduced cost (and "Mental" certainly does look cheap), it's easy to see why this production method has appeal. Such a generic show, one with few complications, with no sense of place and a bland personality, can be slotted into just about any programming hole until something else comes along. Creatively speaking, this system has the advantage of allowing producers to develop a show to their own satisfaction, without the networks' meddling. But no such blossoming took place with "Mental"; it's an artificial flower that can be shipped all over the world without dying, because it was never alive in the first place. ♦

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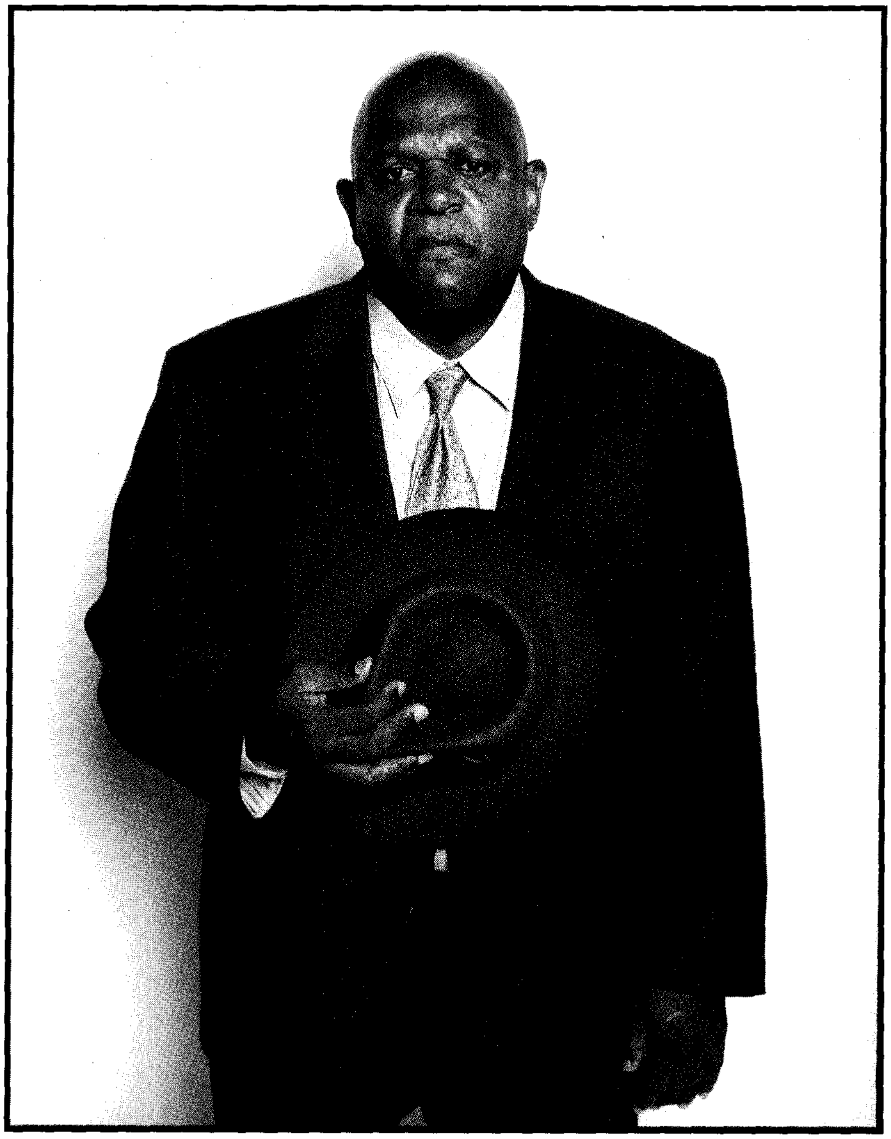
THE THEATRE

HARD SELL

A black "Death of a Salesman."

BY JOHN LAHR



Charles S. Dutton as Willy Loman, at the Yale Rep. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

"To mount an all-black production of a 'Death of a Salesman' or any other play conceived for white actors as an investigation of the human condition through the specifics of white culture is to deny us our own humanity, our own history, and the need to make our own investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as black Americans," August Wilson said in 1996. "It is an assault on our presence, and our difficult but honorable history in America; and it is an insult to our intelligence, our playwrights, and our many and varied contributions to the society and the world at large." At the Yale Repertory Theatre, in New Haven, where almost all of Wilson's plays were first produced, the director James Bundy has brought together a collection of first-rate black actors, including the commanding Charles S. Dutton (himself a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and an outstanding messenger of Wilson's work), to perform Arthur Miller's 1949 "Death of a Salesman." Wilson proves to have been prescient; the experiment doesn't work, for the same reason that staging an all-white production of one of his plays would be folly.

To replace the Jewish Willy Loman with an African-American is to change something elemental in the nature of the play's lament. Loman is driven crazy by America's obsession with winning. Although he has spent thirty-six years opening up the Northeastern territory for his company, he has little to show for it. Somehow, the Redeemer Nation has not redeemed him, or his beloved but stalled sons. Loman is a monument to envy and its hate-filled agitations—all pluck and no luck. His outraged bewilderment—"What's the mystery?," "What's the secret?," "What happened?"—is predicated on the notion that abundance is there for the taking. This sense of expectation and entitlement was simply not shared by African-Americans in 1949. "You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity . . . that you were a worthless human being," James Baldwin wrote in 1962, in an open letter to his nephew. "You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity." "Death of a Salesman" is a brilliant taxonomy of the spiritual atrophy of mid-twentieth-century white America. To remove from the play—through the novelty of casting—the issues of race, class, and history is not to challenge the imagination but to beggar it. "Death of a Salesman" is *about* alienation; it shouldn't be an exercise *in* it.

The confusion begins with Scott Dougan's set. Owning your own house, as the Lomans aspire to do, is part of the American Dream, which is why Miller's script calls for a "small, fragile-seeming home"; the fragility is emblematic of the family's precarious hold on life. Dougan, instead, gives us a painted scrim of three tiers of tenements surrounding the Yale Rep's wide proscenium stage. The Lomans, it would seem, live in a first-floor apartment in one of the tenements, in a space the size of an armory—which makes nonsense of the play's talk about being overheard.

Miller based Willy Loman in large part on his strong-willed, competitive uncle Manny Newman. Newman's "was a house without irony, trembling with resolutions and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow," Miller recalled in his 1987 memoir “Timebends.” Willy speaks with aphoristic authority; he is a walking Dale Carnegie course, all positive thinking. “Personality always wins,” he tells his boys, the philandering Happy (Billy Eugene Jones) and his favorite, Biff (Ato Essandoh), a wanderer who “never made the slightest mark.” The sound of Willy’s buoyant endorsement of their futures—“Start big and you end big,” “You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world”—drowns out a deeper foreboding about his own. “I feel kind of temporary about myself,” he says.

Willy has “his feet on the subway stairs and his head in the stars,” Miller said. The distracted Loman is a figure of towering delusion. “It’s all right. I came back”: Willy’s first words are a lie. Things are not all right, and as he enters, burdened as much by the weight of his deferred dreams as by his sample cases, he is back in body but not in mind. Blacking out, talking to himself, seeing visions, prone to sudden explosions of fury, he is a figure of both awe and awfulness, and, incidentally, a sensational reminder that collapse can be vigorous. Loman’s grandiosity, which makes him alternately insolent and pathetic to the world at large, spackles over his disappointment with himself and his feckless sons. Willy inflates his sales figures, his commission, his accomplishment, and his sons’ potential. “They’ll all end up big—all of them,” he tells his next-door neighbor and only friend, Charley (Stephen McKinley Henderson), whose own son, Bernard (Austin Durant), has grabbed the brass ring and become a successful lawyer. Even when Biff, at the eleventh hour, confronts Willy with the family’s ordinariness, Willy will not accept it. “I am not a dime a dozen,” he roars. “I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!”

Dutton, who is thickset and baldheaded, has a voice that comes at you straight and hard, like a four-seam fastball; at its greatest intensity, it can push you back in your seat. But there is more grief and gladness in Dutton than Miller’s play can draw out. Here he is strongest not in rage but in regret. Of all the losses that Miller contrives to heap on Willy—salary, job, dignity, filial affection—the most heartbreaking is the loss of the ideal of himself as a good father. Loman goes to his death having never understood his sons, or his part in their undoing. He doesn’t know who he is or what he feels; unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, given the casting, this estrangement applies to most of the actors here as well, especially Kimberly Scott, whose Linda Loman is lost in the translation.

“Everything we are is at every moment alive in us,” Miller said. “Death of a Salesman” was a demonstration of this simultaneity, an attempt to “cut through time like a knife.” We are now so familiar with the theatrical trope of flashing back and forth in time within a character’s mind that we’ve forgotten we owe the device to this play. Whereas Miller found a way of making American drama more profound, Les Freres Corbusier are trying to make the American musical more playful. Bring it on! Their newest exercise in travesty, “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson: The Concert Version” (written and directed by Alex Timbers, music and lyrics by Michael Friedman; at the Public), is a smart, vulgar, comic-book romp through history, a sort of “Andrew Jackson for Beginners.” The show stars the droll and cocky Benjamin Walker, as the gun-toting, Indian-hating, land-grabbing Old Stonewall, who “put the ‘man’ in ‘manifest destiny.’ ” The musical hides its rueful satiric feelings about our latest populist President behind a lot of clever burlesque high jinks about our first one. (At one point, the night I saw the show, Jackson threw himself on a female member of the audience and offered to cover her with “popujism.”)

The idea of mixing facts and fun isn’t new, but Les Freres Corbusier find fresh ways of mixing education with celebration. Their faux-naïve comedy gets giddy with intelligence, instead of irrelevance. As the wounded Andrew Jackson and his nurse, Rachel (Maria Elena Ramirez), fall in love, they tease formula Broadway romance and Susan Sontag at the same time, singing in their duet “Illness as Metaphor”: “It’s not blood. / It’s a metaphor for love. . . . / This fever isn’t real. / It represents how I feel.” The quirky humor of the knowing production style, however, is also the company’s problem. In the course of ninety minutes, a certain lyric and visual monotony settles in. Whether Les Freres Corbusier can travel north of Eighth Street will depend on whether Timbers and Friedman can add some emotional variety and characterization to their high camp. But, for the present grave moment, rollicking, in any shape or form, will do. ♦

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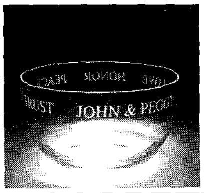

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MUSICAL EVENTS

UNSUNG

Rediscovering the operas of Francesco Cavalli.

BY ALEX ROSS

Opera was, in effect, born twice. Its first coming was during the last decade of the sixteenth century, when humanist musicians and poets at the court of the Medici, in Florence, began to present a new kind of sung drama. The inaugural operas had impeccably high-minded subjects—Daphne changing into a laurel tree, Orpheus descending into Hades with his lyre—and were hyper-elegant in execution. Then, in 1637, a travelling troupe set off a fad for opera in the republic of Venice, and the art underwent a mutation. The season took place during Carnival, the time of dissolution and self-reinvention. Melodrama, bawdy humor, and disorienting collisions of high and low permeated the form. Mythological subjects took on a modern edge; castrato singers flamboyantly reimagined classical heroes; star divas enacted scenes of madness and lament. A paying public showed lusty approval. For the rest of the century, up to five theatres operated in Venice at the same time, drawing an audience that included not only the patrician class but also courtesans, tourists, and a smattering of ordinary people. Opera acquired the intricate mixture of elements—élitist, populist, dignified, demented—which defines the genre to this day.

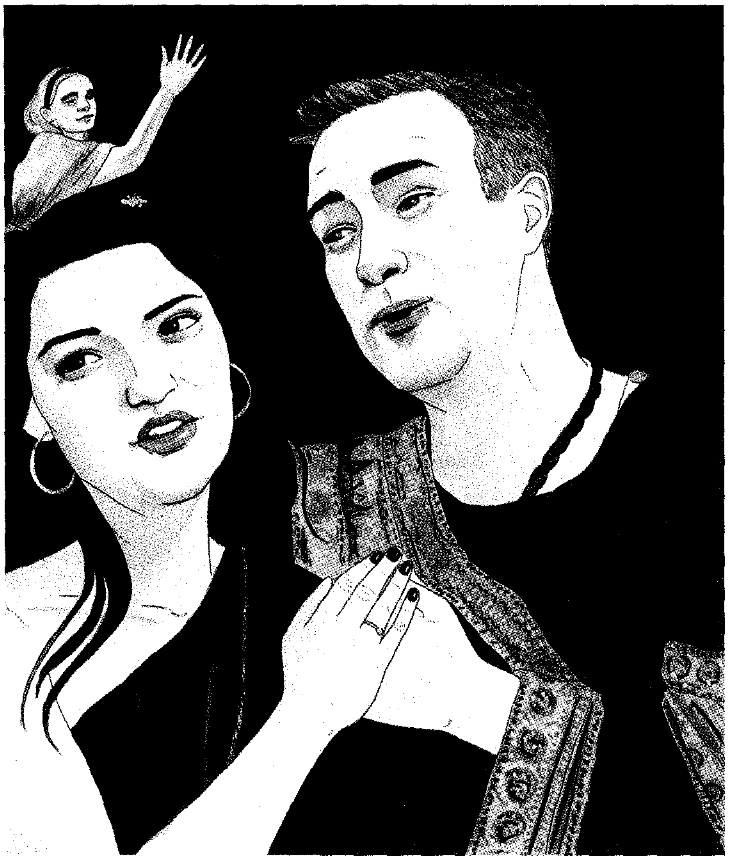
Yet for centuries the Venetian operas themselves were almost forgotten. The leading composers of the period—Francesco Cavalli, Francesco Sacrati, Antonio Cesti, and Antonio Sartorio, among others—huddled in the fine print of histories and encyclopedias. Claudio Monteverdi, whose late masterpieces "The Return of Ulysses" and "The Coronation of Poppea" contributed to the new style, remained famous, but in the popular view nothing of merit happened between Monteverdi's death and the rise of Vivaldi. In recent decades, however, a determined band of conductors and scholars has restored Venetian opera to general circulation. Cavalli's saucy mythological comedy "Calisto" arrived at Covent Garden last fall; "Didone," the first great telling of the story of Dido and Aeneas, reached La Scala at around the same time. Although Cavalli has yet to appear on one of Manhattan's main stages, he did recently attract a flurry of activity in the tristate area: the Wooster Group, the experimental theatre ensemble, incorporated portions of "Didone" into a wild sci-fi evening at St. Ann's Warehouse, in Brooklyn, and Yale University presented an engaging production of "Giasone," a tragicomic tour de force.

Cavalli commands attention on both historical and musical grounds. At the time of his death, in 1676, at the age of seventy-four, he had produced more than thirty operas, and in the process he more or less codified the form. He perfected the transition from recitative to aria—the thrilling transformation of musicalized speech into song. He was astute in his response to literary texts, his writing always falling naturally on the voice. A canny businessman, he managed several theatres, assisted in the preparation of other composers' scores (including Monteverdi's), and arranged for a copyist to preserve his manuscripts for posterity. And he was a masterly composer. If he had been able to travel forward in time to meet Richard Strauss, he would probably have recognized a kindred spirit—a genius with a knack for the bottom line.

I can imagine the moment at which opera for the first time not only entertained audiences but filled them with awe. Early in "Didone," Hecuba, the widow of King Priam, of Troy, unfurls a lament for her ravaged world. In a darkly pulsing, dactylic rhythm, she sings, "Porticoes, temples / Collapse, tremble / Burn and fall. / Purple and empire / Turn to dust, / Shrouded in ashes." Beneath her, a bass line moves down step by chromatic step, in a corkscrew motion that has been echoed, consciously or not, by everyone from Henry Purcell, in "Dido and Aeneas," to Bob Dylan, in "Ballad of a Thin Man." Marie-Nicole Lemieux sings the aria on a sensational new disk entitled "Lamenti," on the Virgin Classics label, with Emmanuelle Haïm conducting. Sorrow and rage coalesce into something like an invocation of dark forces, a summoning of chaos in grand style.

The Cavalli revival got under way in 1952, when Carlo Maria Giulini conducted "Didone" in Florence. In the late sixties, the conductor Raymond Leppard began mounting Cavalli operas at the Glyndebourne Festival, in England; his colleagues Jane Glover and Alan Curtis took an interest in the composer at the same time. In the academic world, the leading Cavallite is Ellen Rosand, a musicologist at Yale. Her book "Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre" is one of those monumental works of scholarship which tell you more than you really need to know about a subject while infusing the tiniest details with excitement. Rosand fell in love with the music when, on her honeymoon, in 1961, she saw a production of "Poppea" in Aix-en-Provence. She later sang the role of Fortuna in excerpts from "The Return of Ulysses" in the presence of the great French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. The young scholar then proceeded from Monteverdi to Cavalli, who dominates her book on Venetian opera. Thanks to a three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation, she has established the Yale Baroque Opera Project, which hosts scholarly conferences, trains students in Baroque technique, prepares critical editions, and presents productions at the end of each school term. "Giasone" was her most recent offering, with a Cavalli conference surrounding two fully staged performances of the work.

The title character is Jason, of Argonauts fame. Medea also appears, although not in familiar tragic guise. Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, the librettist, essentially took the characters of the Argonaut story—Jason, his lovers Medea and Hypsipyle, his fellow-adventurer Hercules, and various others—and inserted them into a comedy of errors, replete with midnight assignations, misunderstood messages, stuttering servants, wisecracking subalterns, and a fair amount of sex. It all turns out happily, with a chastened Jason returning to Hypsipyle's arms and Medea settling down with Aegeus. No children come to grief. As several papers at the conference established, Cicognini took inspiration from the Spanish *comedia*, especially the plays of Lope de Vega; these are classical characters in name only, their behavior exhibiting symptoms of a decadent nobility. (The line forward to Mozart's "Figaro," "Don Giovanni," and "Così" is straight and short.) The scholar Wendy Heller noted the unconventional effeminacy of the hero Jason, a castrato part. He enters with the sumptuously lyrical aria "Delizie, contenti"—"Delights, raptures / That ravish my mind, / Stop, stop"—which Heller aptly described as "the ultimate expression of post-coital languor."



Lauren Libaw and Jay Carter in Cavalli's "Giasone," at Yale.

LARA TOMLIN

Yet, like Mozart's great comedies, "Giasone" has a serious strain, which deepens as the work goes on. Hypsipyle, the queen of Lemnos, abandoned by Jason after bearing him twins, delivers three laments in the course of the opera, each more vehement than the last. The first, which Rosand omitted, in the interest of keeping the evening to a reasonable length (an uncut version would go on for about four hours), is poised and stately, revealing Cavalli's gift for well-turned melody. In "Speranze, fuggite," the second lament, Hypsipyle pronounces the words "My heart is already dead" in an obsessive monotone while the ensemble rotates through various chords, creating psychologically suggestive dissonances. The final lament, which comes after Jason orders Hypsipyle's death at Medea's behest, brings an extreme, almost outlandish explosion of emotion. "Leave my breasts untouched," Hypsipyle cries, "so that my sons may at least feed on the cold milk of their dead mother." The line unfolds over an austerely descending four-note bass, which, after casting its hypnotic spell, gives way abruptly to agitated recitative. Cavalli all but invented the operatic aria, yet he used the device with telling economy; as Rosand observes, he reserved arioso writing for moments in which characters are essentially beside themselves, in which "self-control has failed owing to some kind of extraordinary pressure: fear of death, abandonment, or madness."

For what was essentially an end-of-term college project, "Giasone" came off beautifully. Toni Dorfman, the director, gave the piece a traditional mythic look, although a trio of commedia-dell'arte players added some sassy modern touches, including a certain amount of hip-grinding and butt-slapping. All but three of the singers were Yale undergraduates, some with little or no experience singing opera. But the lack of professional polish was hardly a disadvantage in a piece written at a time when master's degrees in vocal music didn't exist, and opera singers were simply actors with good voices. Indeed, for the low-down comic parts, a background in musical theatre may serve just as well as experience with Mozart and Verdi. (Likewise, in the Wooster Group's "Didone," non-operatic performers made for a charming, if rough-edged, chorus.) Lauren Libaw, a senior music major, took the crucial role of Hypsipyle, rendering her final lament with warmth of tone and intensity of expression. Three more seasoned singers assumed major roles. The countertenor Jay Carter was a bright-voiced and stylish Jason; Laura Atkinson made for a refined, restrained Medea; and Michael Sansoni vividly etched the comic part of Demo.

In coming years, Rosand and her New Haven cadre will go on charting the still largely unexplored landscape of Venetian opera. She has her eye on Sartorio's "Orfeo" and Sacrati's "La Finta Pazza," among others. The Sacrati, whose manuscript resurfaced in 1984, contains the first great mad scene in operatic history. The soprano Anna Renzi, for whom it was written, is often described as the original prima donna; the poet Giulio Strozzi acclaimed her as a singer of "admirable and singular intelligence," whose delivery seemed "not memorized but born at the very moment"—even after she had given a particular role twenty-six times. Renzi said little, watching those around her and adopting their mannerisms as the occasion demanded. Onstage, she disappeared into her characters, indulging in high comedy one night and high tragedy the next. Accounts of these and other early opera performances tell us that the origins of the genre were anything but humble: it began at the peak. ♦

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THE ART WORLD

WILD LIFE

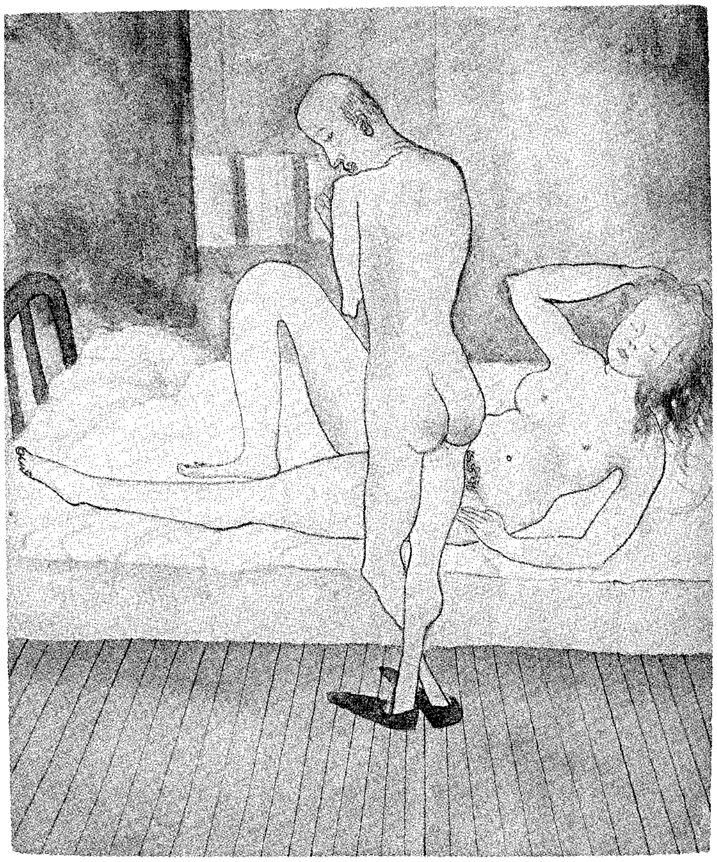
Alice Neel's people.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"All experience is great providing you live through it," Alice Neel said, adding an implied caution: "If it kills you, you've gone too far." She spoke from authority. The great American portrait painter (1900-84), who is the subject of two current New York gallery shows, led the kind of dishevelled life that was thought of, in praise or in blame, as bohemian, before it got stamped dysfunctional. She was a character. Remember characters? Joseph Mitchell published two Profiles in this magazine, in 1942 and in 1964, of a prime specimen, the unwashed Greenwich Village rapscallion Joe Gould, who claimed to be at work on a revolutionary literary opus, "An Oral History of Our Time." Mitchell's fascination eventually became the basis of a movie, "Joe Gould's Secret" (2000), in which Susan Sarandon logged an airy cameo as Alice Neel. In 1933, Neel painted Gould, a casual friend, naked. He grins demonically and sports two uncircumcised penises, with a third dangling from the stool he sits on. For Neel, the savoring of foibles, in herself and in others, was the most reliable entertainment in a life beset by the loss of one baby daughter to diphtheria and another to an absconding husband; a severe mental breakdown; chronic poverty; and the irksomeness, or worse, of assorted lovers. Her invincible commitment to painting won Neel a fitful career in New York, first in Depression-era radical circles—she was briefly a Communist and always a leftist—and then, starting in the nineteen-fifties, after a decade of near-total obscurity, as a living legend. Outlasting insult and condescension, a woman among competitive men, and a figurative artist in times agog for abstraction, she triumphed, and her star continues to rise.

Neel grew up in Colwyn, Pennsylvania, a small town that she hated, in a family dominated by her cultured mother, whom she adored. Her shyly ineffectual father, from a family of opera singers, was a railroad clerk. Neel made art—largely in secret, she said—starting in childhood. After high school, she acquired secretarial skills and landed civil-service jobs. She attended art schools, including the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art and Design), but avoided the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, because she "didn't want to be taught Impressionism, or learn yellow lights and blue shadows. . . . I wasn't happy like Renoir." She met and married an upper-class Cuban artist, Carlos Enríquez, and lived with him in Havana for a year. In 1930, he left her in New York, taking along their surviving daughter (who later killed herself). Neel fell apart. Suicide attempts and hospitalizations, in nightmarish wards, followed. "I died every day," she said of the experience. The spell lifted in the autumn of 1931. The next year, she moved to Greenwich Village, with a sailor, Kenneth Doolittle, who proved a bad bet—he destroyed much of her work in a fit of rage. Then she lived for five years with José Santiago Negron, a Puerto Rican night-club performer, who left her soon after the birth of their son, Richard, in 1939. Next was an ill-tempered leftist photographer and critic, Sam Brody. In 1941, they had a son, Hartley, whose son Andrew Neel made a well-received documentary about his grandmother in 2007. In "Selected Works," a show of sixteen portraits, from 1942 to 1982, at David Zwirner, we see Brody grasping a frightened-looking Hartley with a clawlike hand, around 1945, and, in another painting, gloomily reading war news. ("How Like the Winter," that work is subtitled.) Living for twenty years in Spanish Harlem, Neel often made sitters of neighborhood children. "George Arce" (1959), a terrific painterly cadenza, portrays a boy with whom she stayed in touch even after he was imprisoned for murder, in 1974.

"Nudes of the 1930s," the other new show, at Zwirner & Wirth, samples a theme in which Neel excelled, and an epoch of stark poignancies. It includes a watercolor, from 1935, that is the funniest and funkiest visualization of intimacy I know. Cute, blowsy Alice urinates on a toilet while her solemn boyfriend John Rothschild does the same in a sink. Another watercolor from that year, and perhaps from a memory of the same day, has Alice voluptuously supine on a bed, while Rothschild stands over her, wearing only slippers, in a tense, withdrawn posture. Neel titled it "Alienation"—Rothschild was in anguish, having "just left his wife and a couple of children." (A successful travel-agency entrepreneur, who specialized in trips to the Soviet Union, Rothschild was the steadiest of Neel's men, a friend until his death, in 1975.) Both pictures are beautifully drawn. Rougher, and ruthlessly honest, are paintings and drawings of women Neel knew. A psychoanalyst once asked her, "Why is it so important to be so honest in art?" Her answer: "It's not so important, it's just a privilege." She visits unsentimental dignity on bodies that are pert or sad, and on the spirits, robust or pinched, that animate them. The nudes aren't erotic, but they exude carnal wisdom. They share with much other American figurative painting of the nineteen-thirties a bituminous tonality; the sun of that decade struggled to shine. They are modern in their frontality, nudging subjects off the wall and into the room, while utterly free of stylistic affectation. Neel liked Cézanne but preferred Munch and Soutine; she came to admire the taciturn violence of the Abstract Expressionist Clyfford Still. Her psychologically jangling, impulsive manner can look awkward until you notice that it is a sum of swift, local accuracies, both descriptive (a peculiarly knobby knee) and expressive (a whiplash contour like a shoreline). When most engaged, she was superbly indifferent to overall design.



Neel's "Alienation" (1935)—not erotic, but exuding carnal wisdom.

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"Selected Works" is a bit disappointing in its undoubtedly market-conscious emphasis on formally accomplished pictures, which make me realize that Neel's most elegant works tend to indicate her relative lack of emotional exchange with her subjects. She makes it obvious that people with pulled-together public faces bored her. She titled an arrogantly assured, plaid-shirted, long-haired hunk of an unnamed guy "The Druid" (1968). Good luck to him, and to the "Young Woman" (c. 1946), whose jewels and fur shield a dishearteningly timid niceness. "Annie Sprinkle" (1982) observes the porn actress and militant feminist in dominatrix regalia, with exposed breasts and pierced genitals and a sappily self-approving smile. Sprinkle is painted off-center on a big canvas, with lots of blank surface that says, to me, "No comment."

Neel jolts us in portraits of couples and children. In "The Family (Algis, Julie and Bailey)," from 1968, a pretty woman appears as a doll-like appendage to her macho, wired-looking husband, who casually holds their unhappy baby boy. There's trouble afoot, but also surging vitality. The family is young. It's 1968. The picture is a spiritual snapshot of a convulsive time. "Cindy" (c. 1960) is a little girl in a jumper, with a pageboy haircut, anxiously clutching one knee while gazing out, wide-eyed. She is rendered on a narrow, vertical canvas; she might be falling down a rabbit hole. Neel conveys her vulnerability—she's a target for the unseen incoming missiles of life—without alarm. Cindy will likely be O.K. the way most people are: O.K. enough.

Neel liked quoting, with amusement, a strange remark made to her by Malcolm Cowley: "The trouble with you, Alice, is you're not romantic." In truth, she was a capital "R" Romantic in a very late, modern way: starched by experience. Art was not a refuge for her—she had no refuges, only respites. It was her life lived by other means, in which she enjoyed some moment-to-moment control. Rather than reflect on the peremptory realities of other people, she took them head on, turning their force around and sending it back out. At times, every brushstroke can feel like a victory, against tall odds, of high humor fringed with deadly seriousness. Lots of celebrated twentieth-century art has seemed dated and tame lately. Not Neel's, which, beyond being something to look at, is something that happens to you. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Marquette (Mich.) Mining Journal.

1:04 p.m., skunk with jar on head, officer broke jar off, skunk uninjured.

THE SKY LINE

SPIRALLING UPWARD

Celebrating fifty years of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

In 1959, when the Guggenheim Museum opened, traffic on Fifth Avenue moved in both directions. As you drove northward, the bulbous form emerged from behind flat-fronted apartment buildings like a balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. I first saw the museum that way, as a nine-year-old, and the idea that this beguiling object had been created to display art, or that it might not be up to the task, seemed beside the point.

Fifty years later, it still does, even though the charge that the building upstages the art has become part of its legend. Staff at the Guggenheim like to refer to the building as the most important object in the museum's collection, which makes it odd that the Guggenheim hasn't had a major exhibition of Frank Lloyd Wright's work until now. Its fiftieth-anniversary show also marks the recent completion of an extensive restoration of the building and the fiftieth anniversary of the death of its maddening, egotistical, duplicitous creator. Wright died, at ninety-one, in April, 1959, six months before the museum was finished. He last saw the building in January of that year, when he was photographed looking out from the spiral ramp with the contractor, George Cohen.

Notably absent from that picture was the museum's director, James Johnson Sweeney, who fought with Wright over almost every aspect of the building. Once the architect was gone, Sweeney painted the interior white, instead of the ivory that Wright had wanted; rather than hang the paintings directly on the backward-sloping walls, where Wright wanted them to appear as if they were on artists' easels, he installed them upright, on metal rods projecting from the walls. Over the years, the building has been pushed and pulled in all kinds of directions, rarely to its benefit. Taliesin Associated Architects, the inheritors of Wright's practice, put up a garish addition behind the museum; later, it was demolished to make way for a limestone slab by Gwathmey Siegel, and a bookstore was stuck in the open space beside the rotunda. It's wonderful now to see the Guggenheim at least a bit closer to its 1959 condition, the reinforced-concrete surface of the exterior smooth and voluptuous rather than cracked and shabby. Planters, complete with live plants, and a fountain that Wright installed in the rotunda are back in use. They're hardly his most sophisticated gesture, but it's pleasing that the Guggenheim resisted editing them out.

Wright envisaged the Guggenheim as "a curving wave that never breaks." When it opened, John Canaday, in the *Times*, called it "a war between architecture and painting in which both come out badly maimed." But Wright's conception has always functioned better than its critics have admitted, if never as well as he himself predicted. Works of artists like Alexander Calder and Ellsworth Kelly play off well against the curves, but the space overwhelms anything small, delicate, or highly detailed. This makes the Guggenheim the progenitor of every architecturally assertive museum since, and beside works like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao or Daniel Libeskind's glass-and-metal shards in Denver and Toronto, it now looks almost demure. What strikes you when you walk into Wright's rotunda today is how intimate and comfortable its magnificence is. Art is none the worse for half a century of being seen here.

Wright's career spanned more than seven decades; he was born two years after the Civil War and died at the dawn of the space age. The exhibition is therefore a journey from architecture that, on the swirling ramp of the Guggenheim, can seem almost old-fashioned to work that closely resembles the museum. The strong horizontals, open interior spaces, and overhanging roofs of Wright's early Prairie House style combine nineteenth-century sumptuousness with potent mod-

Wright imagined the Guggenheim as "a curving wave that never breaks."

WERNER BISCHOF/MAGNUM; OPPOSITE: DENNIS STOCK/MAGNUM

ern thrust. In his great house Fallingwater, of 1936, powerful cantilevers lent some of the crispness of European modernism. And then there are the hexagons, hemicycles, triangles, and spirals that pervade his late work. It's appropriate that the exhibition's section about the Guggenheim itself, unquestionably the culmination of Wright's achievement, comes at the top of the spiral. Then again the Guggenheim spiral, ascending toward the sky, can be an overbearing metaphor for a chronological exhibition. (Wright would probably have loved it.) Not every œuvre fits such a narrative, and in Wright's case the curators decided that some work was better treated thematically than chronologically. Residential designs and major urban projects are in separate galleries—mini-exhibitions that remind you of the limitations of Wright's ramp.

Among other things, the exhibition confirms the emergence of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, which co-organized it, from the shadow of Wright's widow, Olgivanna. For a quarter century after his death, she maintained his studio, more like a cult than like an architectural firm. She died in 1985, but it wasn't until recently that Taliesin Associated Architects, which for years purveyed lacklustre imitations of Wright's work, closed down. The foundation's architecture school has broadened its reach to the point of admitting that there are other architects worth learning about. And the drawing archive, surely one of the great architectural collections, is now free of paranoia and eager to share its treasures.

Wright was vastly prolific, and the curators wisely decided to concentrate on key projects rather than show everything. They are smart in defining what is key: not just famous buildings like Unity Temple and the headquarters of the Johnson Wax Company but also the Larkin Building, in Buffalo, senselessly demolished for a parking lot in 1950, and, from 1924, the wonderfully named Gordon Strong Automobile Objective, an unbuilt design for a mountaintop planetarium reached by a spiral road. There are some models big enough to look into and get a sense of Wright's great interior spaces, but the most moving model, of Wright's property surrounding Taliesin, has minuscule buildings, the better to show you the reach of the rolling hills around them. Suddenly you understand the depth of Wright's love for the expanse of American landscape and what he meant when he said that buildings should not be on hilltops but, rather, on hillsides, so as not to destroy the contour of the land. The exhibition also includes computer-generated animations that give you the illusion of walking through a building. This is no substitute for the real thing, but in the case of nine unbuilt or demolished projects virtual reality is as close as you are going to get.

The exhibition's most important elements are the most traditional: more than two hundred drawings, including soft pencil renderings and lavish watercolors, from throughout Wright's career. They have been installed in glass cases, most of which are set at angles along the spiral ramp. Not much has been placed on Wright's slanted walls—a tacit admission of the Guggenheim's issues as a museum—but the idiosyncratically positioned cases feel almost like pieces of sculpture floating free in Wright's space. You're not sure whether the curators are jousting with Wright or protecting him, but there isn't a moment when you are not aware of, and reacting to, his space. This is exactly how he wanted it. ♦

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

The museum, which opened in the fall of 1959, six months after Wright's death, represents the culmination of his achievement.

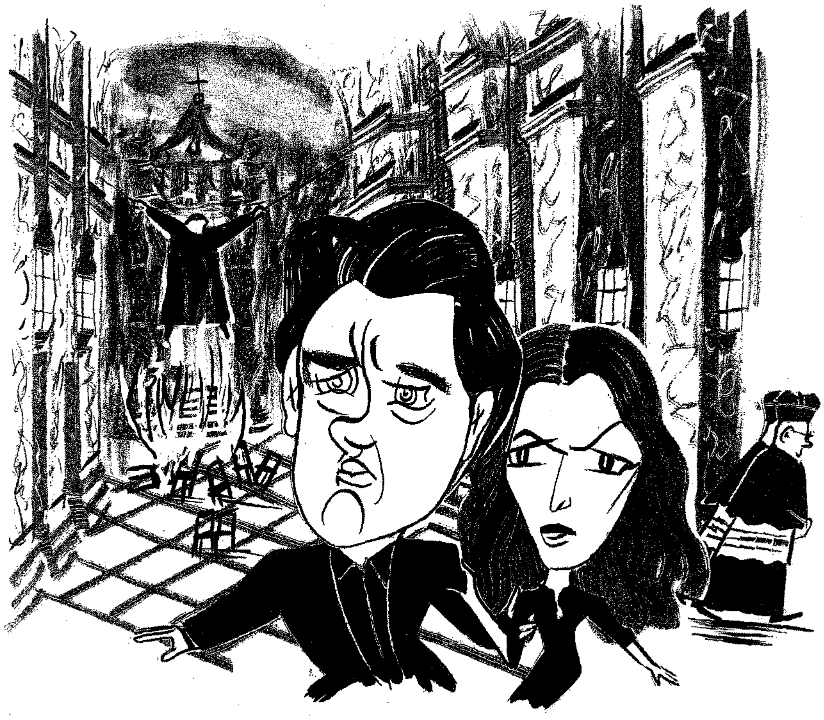
THE CURRENT CINEMA

UNHOLY ALLIANCES

“Angels & Demons” and “Summer Hours.”

BY DAVID DENBY

“The Da Vinci Code”—both the 2003 novel and the 2006 movie—mesmerized audiences with puzzles and bloody horrors, while purporting to edify them with talk of religion and art history. Yet one element in the movie broke through the pretense—the sight of an actor having a good time. Ian McKellen, as Sir Leigh Teabing, an expert on the Holy Grail, wriggled his thick eyebrows and let out his mighty baritone in torrents of expository fervor. Like Laurence Olivier shouting in merriment forty years ago in “The Shoes of the Fisherman,” McKellen was signalling to us that the material was rot. Sir Leigh explained that an extraordinary secret about Jesus had been hushed up for millennia and that, if it were to be exposed, the authority of the Roman Catholic Church would collapse. McKellen may have been playing for laughs, but the director, Ron Howard, and the screenwriter, Akiva Goldsman, adapting Dan Brown’s world-conquering best-seller (forty million copies sold by 2006, eighty million by now), were not. They illustrated Sir Leigh’s lecture with a sombre slide show of devotions, persecutions, and slaughters. The movie quivered with expectation. As the entire world now knows, however, “the greatest secret in modern history” turned out to be an old yarn: Jesus, a fleshly man, married Mary Magdalene, who was not a prostitute but one of the disciples, and she bore him a child.



Tom Hanks and Ayelet Zurer in Ron Howard’s new adaptation of a Dan Brown novel.

TOM BACHTELL

Sir Leigh concluded with a zinger: at the Council of Nicea, in 325, the Church fathers created a false, pure Jesus, and consolidated their power as a caste of male celibates—the priesthood and the hierarchy—by systematically downgrading women. In “Angels & Demons,” a companion to “The Da Vinci Code,” no one has as much fun as McKellen, but I kept thinking of him, because Sir Leigh’s lecture so clearly illustrates Dan Brown’s opportunism. As one pondered whether the charges were true or false, one couldn’t help noticing that Brown, having set himself up as a celebrant of marital pleasure, with the Magdalene story, had created a hero, Dr. Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks), a professor of “symbology” at Harvard, who is a chaste and lonely man—a kind of secular priest. I doubt that Brown was being ironic. He threw Langdon into internecine Church wars, turning him into a detective with special skills as a reader of arcane inscriptions and codes. My guess is that he couldn’t resist stealing Sherlock Holmes—literature’s most popular eunuch—as a character type. Brown drew on the mystique of male chastity even as he was ostensibly overthrowing it.

Brown published “Angels & Demons” in 2000, three years before “The Da Vinci Code.” But the two books are of a piece, and the same team behind the first movie—Ron Howard and Akiva Goldsman—made the new one (joined this time by the screenwriter David Koepp). If you’ve got a successful racket going, don’t change it. There’s the reliable mumbo jumbo of secret societies, insignias, codes, tombs, uncanny inscriptions. There is fire and torment, and unspeakable practices, dwelled upon at length. And there are puzzles and potted bits of art history, bristling with unexpected interest. It seems that great paintings and statues play a leading role in ancient conspiracies. Da Vinci knew Vatican secrets; so did Raphael. (Brown doesn’t bother with minor artists.) At times, the material isn’t all that different from the buttered-popcorn thrills of the recent “Mummy” movies, starring the beefy Brendan Fraser. But Brown and now Ron Howard have added an incendiary element to trash—open hostility toward the Catholic Church. The excitable William Donohue, of the Catholic League, may be predictable in his indignation about “Angels & Demons,” but he isn’t necessarily wrong. The books and the movies turn Church ritual and mystery into a creep show. “Code” had an albino in a cassock who regularly flogged himself in front of a crucifix, and a dying man writing long-winded coded messages in his own blood. “Angels & Demons” has fanatics searing inscriptions into the flesh of their enemies with a branding iron. No doubt, the Church could show more contrition for its many sins, but it may not deserve Brown and Howard, who seem to have a thing about gaudy displays of sadism and self-mutilation—a taste for gothic exploitation that sells well all over the world. The international box-office gross for "The Da Vinci Code" was three-quarters of a billion dollars.

Dan Brown is just mad for cabals. (Right now he is probably writing a novel revealing how Skull & Bones orchestrated the trouble in the Swat Valley in order to vindicate the Bush Administration and sweep Jeb into power.) One of the secret societies in "Code" was the Priory of Sion, which had allegedly been in operation for a thousand years, protecting Jesus' bloodline as it passed down through Merovingian kings and other descendants. In fact, the Priory of Sion was a hoax created, in the nineteen-fifties, by a Frenchman who wanted to ascend to a French throne that no longer existed. The new movie presents another sect: the Illuminati, a group of freethinking geniuses, including Galileo and Bernini, who through the ages have fought the Church's antipathy to science and have in turn been persecuted. It's probably pointless to note that the actual Illuminati got started in Bavaria, not Rome, and a hundred years later than the movie says, and that groups within the Church, especially the Jesuits, have at times encouraged scientific research more vigorously than the current Republican Party. There's no way to fight this stuff.

Furiously busy, the Illuminati steal some antimatter generated by the accelerator at CERN, the particle-physics site on the Swiss-French border, and plant it in the Vatican. The Church, again, is on the verge of destruction—not just physically but in its essence. If antimatter is, as scientists in the movie believe, the source of life, then what is God's role in creation? The Illuminati have also kidnapped four cardinals, and are killing them in freaky ways, one at a time, at important art-historical sites. While all this is going on, the other cardinals are meeting in solemn conclave. The Pope has died, and they have to choose a new man. Are the Illuminati trying to put one of their own in the papacy?

The Higher Questions are delicately sprinkled throughout the clerical bloodbath and an endless chase. Langdon and an Italian scientist from CERN, Dr. Vittoria Vetra (Ayelet Zurer), bounce all over Rome, and the movie turns into a treasure hunt of sorts, with, for example, the spear in Bernini's "Ecstasy of St. Teresa," in one church, pointing toward his fountain in the Piazza Navona, where a cardinal is about to be drowned.

The Church, miffed by "The Da Vinci Code," refused Howard access to the Vatican for "Angels & Demons," so he re-created St. Peter's Square in the parking lot of the Hollywood Park racetrack. The sets are convincing, but why has Ron Howard, who made the impressively accurate "Apollo 13," fallen among frauds and daft dreamers? Apart from conspiracy theorists, who really believes in hokum like Dan Brown's? Gullibility and pockets of anti-Catholic feeling are too simple as explanations for the worldwide appeal of "The Da Vinci Code." Something more complicated is going on in which, precisely, *not* believing—the enjoyment of humbug, the crazier the better—is part of the turn-on. If these movies made any damned sense, the public response might be no more than a yawn.

The French writer-director Olivier Assayas has recently made nasty erotic thrillers ("Demonlover" and "Boarding Gate") about the impersonal brutality of global capitalism. But, in the new "Summer Hours," he is working in a calmer and more lyrical style. Reaching back to humanist masters like Renoir, he brings the global economy to bear on the fate of a bourgeois French family. A woman in her seventies (Edith Scob), the niece and possibly the lover of a deceased French painter, dies at her home outside Paris, and her three grown children, who were brought up there, have to decide what to do with the house, the Art Nouveau furniture, and the paintings, by Corot and other artists, that they lived with. Of the three, only the eldest (Charles Berling), an economics professor in Paris, wants to keep the place; his brother (Jérémie Renier) lives in Shanghai, where he runs a sneaker factory, and his careless and harried sister (Juliette Binoche), a designer in New York, is rapidly becoming Americanized.

It doesn't take us long to realize that the house is France itself—cultivated, beautiful, but no longer central in the global era. The movie takes a ruminative turn. What will happen if the house is sold, the collection given to the Musée d'Orsay, the memories dissipated? It's a tragedy, but how big a tragedy? What happens to art when it passes from private worship to public scrutiny? In the end, Assayas, shooting the film with relaxed, flowing camera movements, gives his love not to beautiful objects but to the disorderly life out of which art is made. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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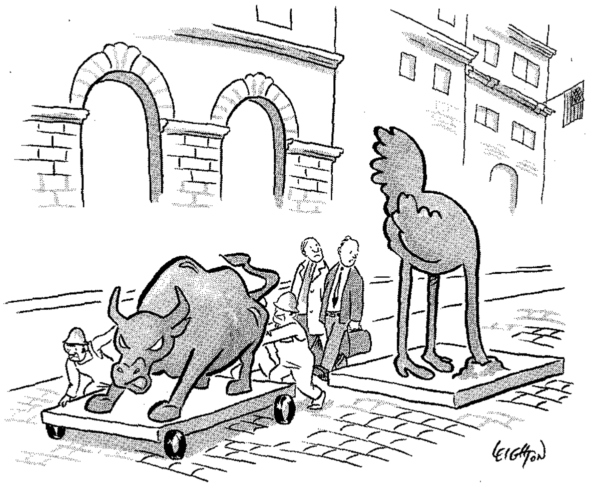
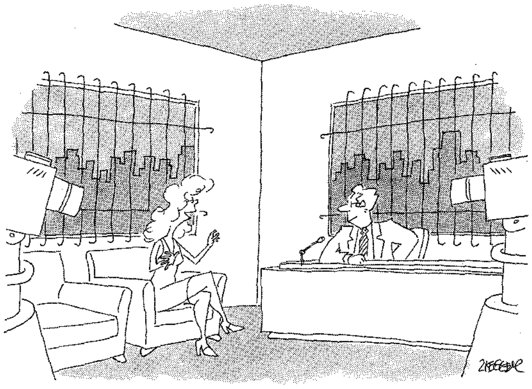
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Leo Cullum, must be received by Sunday, May 24th. Finalists in the May 11th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 8th & 15th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I think the head's in the wrong place."
Steve Punch, Danville, Calif.



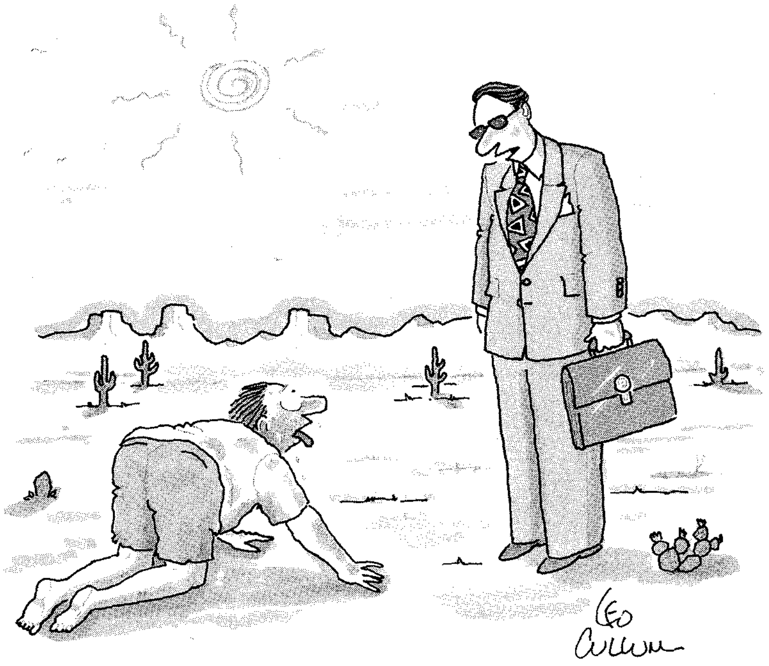
THE FINALISTS

"Both the movie and I will be released this summer."
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.

"This is fancy role-playing for a conjugal visit."
Benjamin New, Plantation, Fla.

"It's my first time on 'Celebrity Parole Hearing.'"
Al Miro, Astoria, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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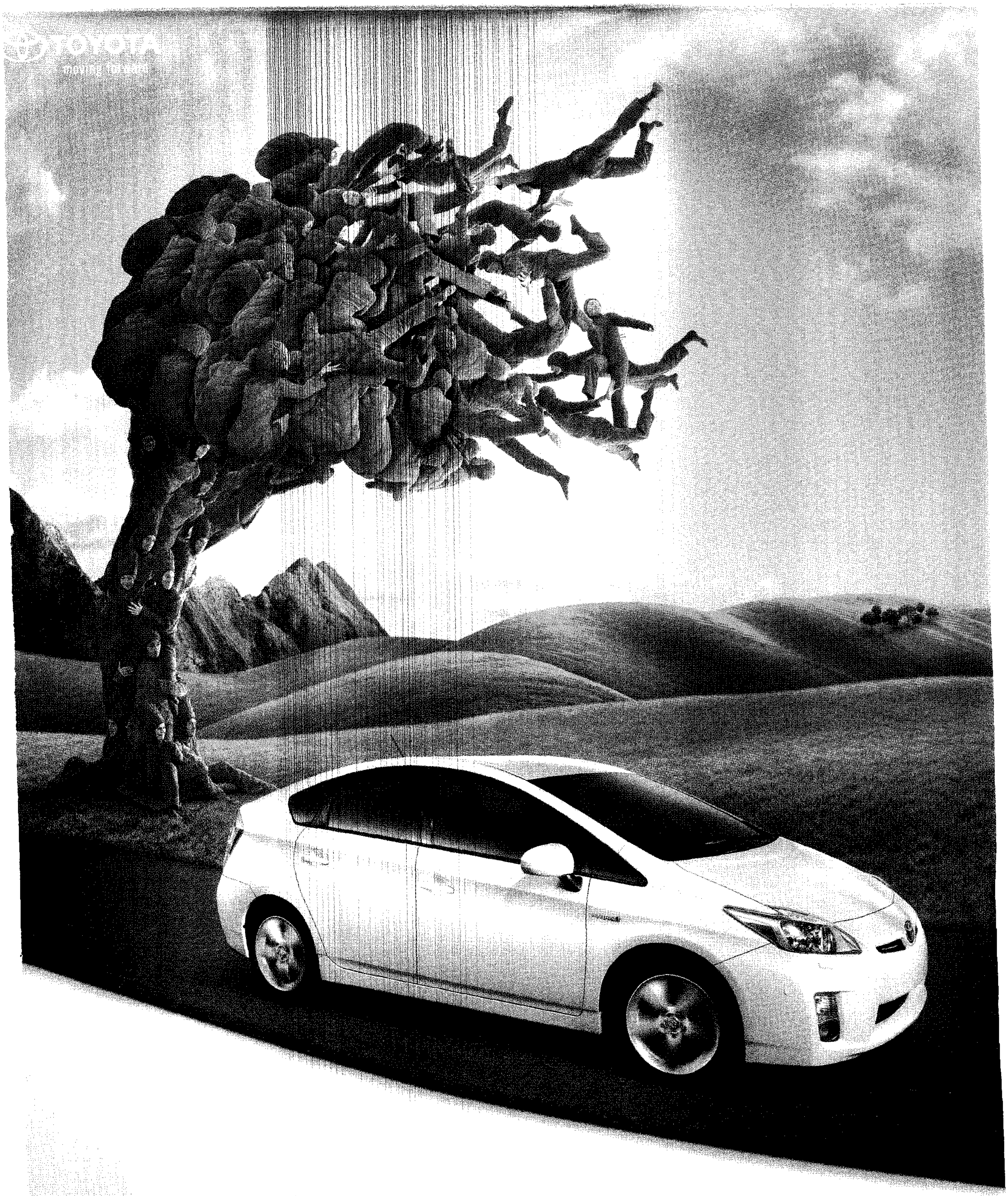

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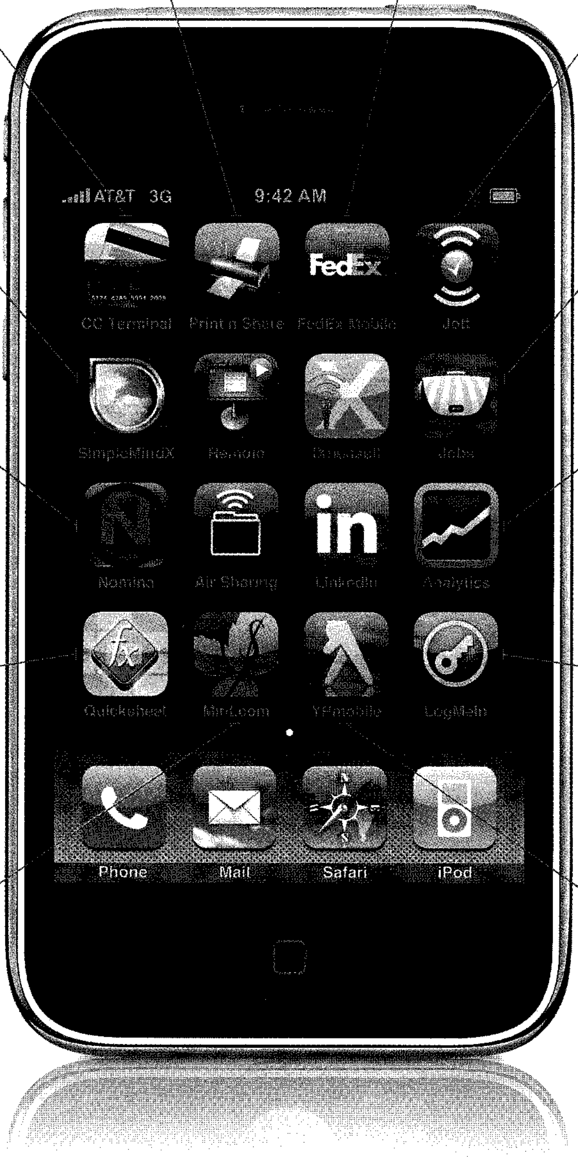

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